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CAPT. CRIMSON COWL
THE ROAD RAIDER

OR,

DEADWOOD DICK ON HIS METTLE.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PASSENGER THAT DID RIDE.

"I TELL yer, I don't b'lieve no sech a thin
sir!"

"Why not?"

"'Ca'se thar hain't been a report of a road
agent in the vicinity of Gunnison, in years
I've lived thar since the town was furst started
and I reckon I know whereof I speak!"

DEADWOOD DICK AND SHERIFF SHORTSLEEVES MADE THEIR APPEARANCE ON THE ROOF
OF THE VERANDA WHICH THEY HAD DETECTED THE WOULD-BE ASSASSIN IN
THE ACT OF CLIMBING. BUT THEY WERE TOO LATE.

"I don't care a darn what *you* know. I know I was halted by a cuss who wore a crimson mask, not over four miles t'other side o' heur, and was forced to give up every red in my possession. An' now I want a passage to Gunnison. When we get thar, I've got some valuables I can put up, and pay you off squar', for the accommodation!"

"Nary time! Nobody rides on this hearse, 'cept they forks over the collateral beforehand. That aire thing is played, sure's my name is Sol Slater!"

"But, man, I *must* go! It's a matter o' life and death!"

"Can't help it if it's the matter of a dozen lives an' deaths!" was the blunt reply. "Yer can't travel on this stage unless ye plank down the fare in advance. So that settles it!"

The scene was one peculiar to the western mining regions. A mountain stage driven by an old Jehu named Sol Slater, and bound for the popular mining city of Gunnison, Colorado, had halted at a small camp, twenty miles from Gunnison, to obtain a relay of horses before proceeding further on the journey.

It was while the horses were being changed that the foregoing conversation took place between the driver of the coach, and a man who, as will be noted, had asked for a free passage on to Gunnison.

His plea for making this solicitation, was, that earlier in the day, and but a few miles from the relay station, he had encountered a road-agent, who wore a crimson cowl, and who had forced him not only to hand over his money but to give up his horse; hence his desire to reach Gunnison by stage.

Sol Slater was a gruff and unaccommodating veteran of the "ribbons," and had promptly refused the desired ride.

The applicant was a rough-dressed man, with a heavily bearded face, whose expression was honest. He carried a pick and was evidently a miner, in hard luck.

Within the coach were three passengers.

One was a well-dressed, intelligent looking man, of some five-and-forty years—a person whose well-preserved face, hair and beard denoted that his path through life had not been obstructed with very many thorns.

Person Number 2 was a maiden of some eighteen years, and very pretty both of face and figure. She possessed a fair, creamy complexion, with perfectly chiseled features, sparkling brown eyes, and soft sunny hair. She, too, was well dressed, and appeared to be traveling with the elderly gentleman, last before mentioned.

The third occupant of the coach, was a good, appearing fellow, and probably yet young in the twenties. He possessed a rather handsome face of the bold and manly type, lit up by a pair of keen, brown eyes, that seemed capable of reading a person through and through. His lip was ornamented with a graceful mustache, while his hair, worn long, fell in ripples over his shoulders.

His attire was rather on the sportish order, for he wore a pair of white duck pantaloons, thrust in a pair of patent-leather top-boots, also a white flannel shirt, open at the throat. Over the shirt was a loose velvet jacket, ornamented with buttons made out of five dollar gold-pieces, while upon his head was a snowy white sombrero, pinned up on one side with a pure white diamond.

A heavy-linked gold chain passed around his neck, and communicated with a watch-pocket at the waist, while a magnificent solitaire diamond ring gleamed upon one finger.

All in all he was rather a remarkable looking personage, but, unlike most Western sports, he wore no weapons exposed to view.

It was evident, too, that he was unacquainted with the other two parties, who occupied the opposite seat; but the windows in the doors of the coach being open, he appeared to take a lively interest in the conversation that passed between Sol Slater and the pilgrim applicant for a free ride to Gunnison.

It was the same with the pretty occupant of the seat just opposite the sport, for she turned impetuously to the elderly gent, who sat beside her.

"Papa, why don't you help the poor man to a ride?" she demanded. "You'll never miss the cost and it's a shame he should walk from here to Gunnison!"

"No one knows who he is, or anything about him," was the quiet rejoinder. "With the driver, I seriously doubt his story about road-agents, dear!"

"But, papa, he's honest-looking, and I feel

sure he is telling the truth!" protested the daughter.

"Never mind, Mora," was the reply. "You are not in position to be as good a judge of character as I am, and, candidly, I don't like the looks of the man. We have too much at stake to mix up with strangers!"

This with a casual glance at the sport.

Although he was looking out of the window, the sport evidently knew the hint was meant as much for him as the party outside, for he bit his lip, and a flushed spot appeared in either cheek.

The words of Mora's parent seemed also to stir him to action, for he immediately opened the door of the coach and stepped outside.

"Hello!" he said, facing Slater. "What's the reason you won't allow this man to ride to Gunnison?"

"'Cause I won't," was the dogged answer. "He hain't got no money ter pay his fare, an' he can't travel on this hearse!"

"But, be reasonable, man. He promises to settle with you as soon as he reaches Gunnison!"

"Promises be danged! I don't do no bizness on credit fer nobody!"

"Very well; if *that's* the sort of a man you are, I'll pay the man's fare, myself. What's the passage?"

"Not a darned red! That feller can't ride!"

"Can't, eh?"

And a peculiar glitter entered the sport's keen eyes.

"No! he can't, an' *that* settles it!"

"Why can't he?"

"'Cause I've said et, an' you heard the blast o' my bugle!"

"Jest so. Now, look here, you miserable cuss, you have showed the meanness of your nature quite far enough, and I want to impress upon your withered mind one important fact, namely: If this man don't ride in this coach to Gunnison, you don't drive the coach to Gunnison!"

"I don't hey?"

"Nary drive!"

"An' who's goin' to prevent me, I wanten know?" Slater retorted, aggressively.

"A feller just my size and picture gallery!" the sport replied. "Unless this stranger goes along as a passenger, this stage don't leave here to-night, an', when it does go, *you* won't occupy the box!"

"Who will?"

"I will!"

"What'll I be doin' all this time, cuss ye?"

"You'll be sleepin' your last sleep, over in under the pines yonder!"

"Oh! so you'd kill me, hey?"

"As quick as scat, if you try any monkey business with me!"

Slater uttered a savage growl, and reached for his revolver, but, before he could draw it, the sport had him covered with as fine a six as one could wish to gaze upon—a self-cocker, too.

Slater was an arrant coward, when the test came.

"Stop! don't shoot!" he cried, throwing up his hands. "I cave, so get inter the hearse, and we'll be movin'. But, before we start, who the thunder are you?"

"My name is Richard Bristol, but I am perhaps best known as Deadwood Dick, Junior!" was the reply, at which the pilgrim stranger started, visibly.

Dick did not notice it, however; so he and the man with the pick got aboard, Slater mounted the box, cracked the whip, and the stage rolled away toward Gunnison.

CHAPTER II.

CAPT. CRIMSON COWL.

At the time the stage left the station, the day was fast waning, and would give way to night as soon as the lower ravines were reached.

When Dick and the man whom he had befriended entered the coach, they sat side by side, and the stranger said:

"My friend, I've got much ter thank ye fer, 'cause ef it hadn't bin for you, I allow I wouldn't hev got a ride at all, an' would hev had to fut it all the way. I kin thank ye, an' that's all I kin do, at present!"

"No more is required!" Dick replied. "I understood you was broke, and made up my mind if you wanted a lift as far as Gunnison you should have it, regardless of the driver!"

"Thank ye ag'in. You're about the pluckiest man I've seen in a long while, an' you bet I'm one as cottons to a game man, every day in their week. When that 'ar road-agent s'prised me I wish you'd 'a' been thar!"

"I should have been very much pleased to have been present!" Dick declared. "I have a special antipathy for the light-fingered frater-

nity, and if this particular gent you have reference to should chance to come within my reach, I'll endeavor to make it interesting for him!"

"You may strike the chance!" the other said, "for when I was in Gunnison, the other day, I heard that he had committed depredations, quite close in that vicinity."

"In that event I may take it upon myself to look him up!" Dick observed. "I'm pretty handy at that sort of business."

"Yes, so I understand," was the reply. "I have frequently heard of you, but, I never suspected who ye was, until ye give yer handle. I've heerd o' Deadwood Dick more times than I've got fingers an' toes."

"Ah, is that so? I did not suppose I was so well known in Colorado. By the way, what is your handle, pardner?"

"Jack Myers."

"Well, Mr. Myers, what sort of a looking man was this road-agent?"

"I can't perzactly tell you how he looked in the face, fer it was covered with a red mask, and all his other togs were dyed crimson red, as was the trappings of his hoss. They told me at Gunnison the other day, afore I started out on the last prospectin' trip, that he was known as Captain Crimson Cowl, and warned me to look out for him. But, lordy! I never expected to run across the cuss."

"Does he run on his own hook and alone?"

"Yas, so far as I know."

"Did you lose much?"

"Yas, a considerable, fer me. He rid onto me when I least expected it, an' ordered me to throw up my hands, an' as he had the drop on me you kin bet I did it, mighty quick; then he dismounted, made me dismount, an' went through me, taking fifty dollars, my watch, compass, revolvers, and bowie-knife. Then he remounted, grabbed my horse by the bits, an' galloped away, leaving me to hoof it to the relay station."

"How long was this before the stage came along?"

"About two hours. He come the same way we're goin' now, an' must hev rid right by ther station, et strikes me."

"Is there no clerk at the station?"

"No one but an Injun what takes keer o' the hosses."

Conversation then lagged for awhile, until Myers finally broke the silence, just at early dusk.

"I say, friend, I've got to get a pair of pops when I get to Gunnison, and I noticed you had a daisy. Got any objections to a feller's lookin' at et?"

"Certainly not," and Dick handed him the handsome weapon, of which he had good reason to be proud, for it was a magnificent, gold-mounted affair.

"By gosh! that's a beauty!" Myers declared. "Self-cocker, too, eh?"

"Yes."

"How much for it?"

"Something over two hundred."

"Want to sell it?"

"Not I."

"But you've another, and I'll give you twice two hundred."

"I don't care to sell."

"But, you got to *shell*!" Myers cried, leaping suddenly to his feet. "I've got you all covered, and the first one that attempts to draw a weapon, dies on the spot. Up with your dukes, all of you, instanter!"

There was no mistaking the intense meaning of that order. It meant business in the fullest sense, and all hands went up promptly.

"Quite right," the road-agent said. "A suspicious movement signifies death. I want first your weapons, then your money. If you offer the least resistance I'll have your lives. So act promptly."

He turned to Deadwood Dick, first, and, with revolver ready for instant use, searched him.

Unfortunately Richard had but the one weapon, or he would have taken the chances of using it.

The search resulted in the robber's obtaining a goodly sum of money, Dick's watch and his diamonds.

The daring scoundrel then turned to the elderly man, but never failing to keep an eye on the sport.

"I want your valuables, too—everything, or I'll murder your daughter. Give me the fifteen thousand dollars, in the belt about your waist, and hesitate, at your peril!"

"But, I—I—" began the elderly man.

"Come!" ordered the road-agent. "I know none of you are armed, and resistance means death to all of you. This self-cocker will fix you

before you can lay a hand on me. If you don't believe it, hesitate a moment longer!"

The elderly gentleman unloosened a belt which he had worn about his waist, in under the vest, and gave it to the brigand.

"Thanks!" the villain said, with mock politeness. "I am aware that you have more money than this, James Monte, but this will do for the present. I may have occasion to draw on you again, at some future time. So tendering you all the kindest regards of Captain Crimson Cowl, I will bid you—*Au revoir!*"

Keeping the victims covered, he backed to the door, opened it, and bounding out, disappeared in the darkness.

And the coach rolled clumsily on.

Deadwood Dick was tempted to leap out, and follow the audacious scoundrel, but realizing that he was disarmed, he concluded that it would be inadvisable to do so.

Clearly, Captain Crimson Cowl was up to his standard, and prepared for all emergencies.

For some time, not a word was spoken within the coach; then Monte said, evidently to his daughter:

"Yes! I see it all. It was a boldly planned robbery, and I am out fifteen thousand dollars, besides the papers which are worth double that amount. But, wait! as clever as the job was done, I will show 'em a trick worth ten of that!"

The lone passenger seated on the opposite side understood what Monte's words meant, but said nothing.

He knew that Monte meant to charge him with conspiracy in the daring robbery, and he set his teeth firmly together, while his eyes gleamed dangerously!

He realized that he had been taken in and done for, in the fullest sense, at not only his own large expense, but Monte's also, and he inwardly vowed to right the wrong.

The stage tore on through the night, but when at the darkest hour before the dawn, it rolled up before the principal hotel in Gunnison, and Monte and daughter alighted, and signaled an officer, the officer failed to find Richard of Deadwood an inmate of the "bears."

Where was he?

CHAPTER III.

FITZ PERCY.

THERE are plenty of larger towns in Colorado, and those that do a larger general business than Gunnison; but, though possessing only a few thousand inhabitants, the town, with its picturesque location, and its thriving mining resources, stands dear to the heart of the average Western sporting man, and to the sight-seeing tourist. An odor of the California days of '49-'53 clings about the place, which renders it dear to the "old vet," and attracts the admiration of the tenderfoot.

It is not a "fast," or a sporting town, yet there is plenty of amusement for those in search of it.

When James Monte and daughter arrived in the city, and narrated the circumstances of the daring stage robbery—something that had not occurred for many a month—there was a sensation.

Monte was one of the substantial business men of the place, although, having acquired a comfortable fortune, he had virtually retired from active business life, intrusting his mining and other operations to the superintendency of his prospective future son-in-law, Mr. Halburton Hayden, as fine and exemplary a young man as the town could boast.

The history of the family of James Monte was somewhat peculiar. In his earlier years he had married a woman of Franco-American descent, named Felice Baudet, but the match was not a happy one, although husband and wife continued to live together up to within a year of our story, when a formal separation took place.

The result of the union had been two daughters, twins at that, and as unlike as could well be imagined, one being a decided brunette, while the other was a blonde.

They were named, respectively, Belle and Mora.

When Felice left her husband and moved into a cottage, where she supported herself by her needle, with which she was skilled, she took Belle with her, while Mora remained behind as her father's housekeeper.

Both were beautiful girls, after their peculiar type of beauty, and both were liberally educated. But, since the separation of husband and wife, if the sisters met each other on the street, they passed each other by without speaking.

Belle was eminently her mother's child, while Mora clung to the father's side.

The public never knew the cause of the separation, and for a time it created an immense amount of gossip, which finally, however, died out, and the matter became a thing of the past.

As stated, the stage robbery by Captain Crimson Cowl threw all Gunnison into a fever of excitement. It had been months since anything of the kind had occurred anywhere in the vicinity; hence the consternation and astonishment.

What did it mean or portend? Were the stage-trails once more to be haunted by lawless and law-defying marauders, as in days gone by?

It would seem so; and men with fat wallets involuntarily clapped their hands upon them, and kept a suspicious eye on whoever might chance to be near them.

As soon as convenient, after reaching Gunnison, Monte had the following reward notices printed and conspicuously posted:

"FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD!"

"The above sum will be paid by me for the capture of a road-agent known as Capt. Crimson Cowl, who, on the 10th inst., boarded the incoming Gunnison-Riota stage, and robbed me of a large sum of money.

"Also, a like reward for the arrest of his pal, known as Deadwood Dick, Junior.

"JAS. MONTE."

Of course, this notice only served to stimulate the excitement, and not a few of the bolder spirits, who had nothing else in particular to do, organized into parties, and, taking to the surrounding country, made careful search for the daring Crimson Cowl; but, within a week's time, all returned, unsuccessful, tired out and thoroughly disgusted.

About ten days after the stage-robbery, Monte received the following by mail:

"GUNNISON, June 20th, 188-.

"MR. JAMES MONTE:—

"MY DEAR SIR:—It is simply no use for you to advertise for my capture, as there are not people enough in Gunnison to take me; therefore, you might as well tear down the reward notices and use them for kindling.

"Those papers you so kindly handed over to me are not available, and as I observe that you are a regular visitor at the post-office, I have left them there for you.

"For this kindness on my part, you ought to reward me handsomely; but of course will not do so. Very likely I will get a whack at you again, some day. Ta-ta!

"Yours truly,

"CAPT. CRIMSON COWL."

Although enraged at the audacity of the letter, Monte hastened to the post-office, and, sure enough, a package containing the documents he had been robbed of awaited his call. Although the papers were of great importance to him, they were of no value to the road-agent, hence, probably, the reason of their return.

When the speculator returned to his house, a caller awaited him in the parlor.

This visitor was a typical specimen of the dude.

He was fastidiously dressed in a suit of expensive clothing, that fitted him "like the paper on the wall," the pants, in particular, giving to his lower extremities somewhat of an elongated and attenuated appearance.

His feet were graced with patent-leather shoes, and the stand-up collar he wore crowded so close up under his chin that it was with difficulty he could turn his head.

In one hand he carried a white plug hat, while in the other he grasped a gold-headed cane.

As for his face, it was smoothly shaven, with a sickly pair of tow-colored Burnside whiskers, and his complexion was rather cadaverous, although his features were full and round.

His eyes were partly obscured from view by a pair of eye-glasses, and his hair was parted in the middle.

Altogether, he was a pronounced specimen of the genus dude.

He arose with a profound bow, as James Monte entered the room.

"Aw! you will excuse me!" he said, "but have I the honor of meeting Mr. James Monte, the very clever retired speculator?"

"Yes, I'm Jim Monte!" was the reply, for Monte had very little respect for anything that was dudish.

"Aw! yes, I weally thought I could not be mistaken, and I assuah you, my deah boy, that I am perfectly delighted to know you. As you probably have never had the honor of knowing me, donchersee, I will take the lwib-

erty of introducing myself. I am Festus Fitz Percy, doncherknow?"

"No, I can't say that I know anything about it!" Monte replied, bluntly. "What's your business here, sir?"

"My deah boy, I am a detective, doncherknow, and hearing you wanted to employ a good man of that pwoession, it occurred to me it would be a weally excellent idea to come and put in an application!"

"You a detective?" James Monte ejaculated, incredulously.

"Aw! yaws! I have served a number of years on the force, and have been weally wonderfully successful, you know—yaws! in fact, phenomenally so!"

"Well, sir, what is all this to me? What ever put it into your head that I was in need of the services of a detective?"

"But you were robbed, doncherknow, and I weally supposed you would like to catch the wobbler, or at least employ some one to do it for you?"

"I do not propose to employ a detective at all!" Monte declared. "If the reward I have offered is not sufficient stimulus to secure Crimson Cowl's capture, I shall make no further move in the matter!"

"Aw! just so!" Fitz Percy said, rising. "Of course that is for you to say, of course: but, naturally, one would believe that you would be more solicitous of recovering a large sum of money. Weally, I trust you will pardon me for offering my services where they are not wanted?"

And putting on his hat the caller left the house—and also left a troubled expression upon the face of James Monte.

"I don't understand this!" he muttered. "This fellow is no detective, and that was not his object in coming here. Of that I am well satisfied. The question is, who and what is he?"

While, when outside the speculator's house, Mr. Festus Fitz Percy soliloquized:

"Kind of singular! There is something in this, I can't understand. He didn't seem overly anxious to recover this money, it rather strikes me!"

CHAPTER IV.

A CLEW.

ONE of the most noted gambling-houses in Gunnison, at the time of which we write, was known as the Silver Grill. Whence it derived its peculiar name, we shall not undertake to explain, but, such was the name, and the place was run by a thoroughbred sport, recognized as Fighting Fargo, though it is pretty safe to say that no one knew exactly what his real name was.

The Silver Grill was a well-fitted up and richly-furnished apartment, and was patronized by the best as well as the worst sporting element of the town.

The games were numerous and varied, and in addition, there was an elegant bar to supply the wants of the thirsty.

After leaving the residence of James Monte, Fitz Percy made his way leisurely to the Silver Grill.

"This dude racket didn't work worth a cent!" he muttered, with an air of dissatisfaction, "and it's evident I shall have to adopt another disguise, or else come out in my true character. That won't do either, for the five hundred dollars for my capture would speedily make me a target for some one's bullet, sure's my name is Deadwood Dick.

"Another thing that puzzles me is about this Monte. He don't want to employ a detective. Why not? One would suppose he would be eager to do anything to recover his property. But, barring the notices he has caused to be put up, he don't appear to care a straw whether he gets his money back or not. I can't quite understand what it means, blame me, if I can!"

Entering the Silver Grill, Deadwood Dick—for the dude was none other than the incomparable detective in a new guise—sauntered about among the tables for awhile, pausing now and then at one where a game of more than usual magnitude was going on.

He had only been in the town a short time, and, although he had lost heavily by the stage robbery, Crimson Cowl had missed something like two hundred dollars in his search of the detective's person.

With this amount Dick had been able to tog himself out in his dude disguise, and it now was his intention to replenish his depleted wallet by venturing in some of the games; but after wandering about among the tables and seeing no

opportunity for taking a hand, he concluded to wait until evening before he tried his luck.

Proceeding to his hotel, he accomplished a complete transformation, so as to look exactly as on the night of the stage robbery, for he had definitely decided on a bold step—that of defying James Monte's reward offers.

"For!" argued Dick, "nobody in Gunnison knows me, unless it is Monte, his daughter, and the stage-driver, and if I watch out sharp, I am not very likely to run against any of them very soon. If I do, they'll not be able to prove that I am in any way connected with Captain Crimson Cowl. I'll take my chances, anyhow, rather than skulk around in disguise."

After supper, at the hotel, he once more sought the Silver Grill, where, as in the afternoon, he found everything in full blast, and seating himself at an unoccupied table, and lighting a cigar, he settled back to enjoy a good smoke.

He had been seated but a few minutes, however, when another person came along and took a seat at the same table—not a man, but a decidedly attractive and dashing-appearing young woman, of some eighteen or nineteen years.

She was of the brunette type, with prettily molded features, dark, lustrous eyes, and a mouth of tempting sweetness of expression. Her hair had been cut short, and clung in close curls about her well-shaped head.

She possessed a symmetrical figure, and was attired in a plain dark cloth dress, while a jaunty sombrero graced her head.

She surveyed Dick inquiringly, as she sat down, and he returned the glance with interest. "Stranger in town, eh?" she interrogated.

"Yes, rather," Dick replied.

"I thought so. I know pretty near every one 'round these parts, and I allow I never sot eyes on you before!"

"Doubtless you are right. I never was in Gunnison before."

"No? Well, I reckon you'll find it a pretty fly town, all told. Going to stay here long?"

"Probably not. I don't generally remain long in a place!"

"Well, that's some like me. What's your name? Mine's Reckless Ruth, for short."

"Oh! you can call me Jones—Jim Jones!"

"Get out! There's no Jones about you. You're too much of a sport to be merely a commonplace Jones. However, if you wish to keep your name a secret, so be it. It don't make a continental red to me. D'ye ever play poker?"

"Sometimes."

"S'pose we have a little game, say for a dollar a corner. I ain't got very much boodle, but I reckon I can scare up a few dollars."

"Oh! I'm agreeable," Dick replied. "Got the cards?"

"No, but, I can get some!"

She arose and went to the bar, and when she returned, had a fresh pack of cards, a bottle of wine and two glasses.

"Might as well smile as we play!" she said. "I s'pose you imbibe, occasionally?"

"Not as a habit. However, I shall be pleased to drink to your very good health!" and they drank a glass apiece.

Then the cards were shuffled.

It speedily began to appear that Reckless Ruth was an expert at handling the pasteboards, for she won dollar after dollar from the sport, until he found his cash account getting too alarmingly small to play any longer.

"That will do for me!" he declared, when she finally raked in a pot of ten dollars. "I know when I've got enough!"

She laughed merrily, and gave him a quizzical glance.

"What! done already?" she said. "Why, you haven't got as much sand as I thought you had!"

"I chance to have more sand than money, just at present," was the reply. "Then, too, your luck is something wonderful."

"For once it has been pretty fair, for a wonder!" she replied. "You don't think I cheated, do you?"

"If I did think so, I'd not have played with you!"

"Thanks. I allow make it a point to play square, unless I've got some sucker to deal with, an' I allow you're a standard proof, every time. I kinder take a likin' to you, ef yer name be Jim Jones, an' ef you want to borrow a few dollars, don't forget to call on Reckless Ruth!"

"Thank you, but I am in no need of borrowing funds at present, although I am not well enough heeled to buck the tiger to any extent. By the way, miss, there is a question I would like to ask you if you will condescend to answer me!"

"Certainly, I will!" and a softer light shone

from her eyes, proving it would be a pleasure to her to please the sport. "What is it you wish to ask, sir?"

"I desire to inquire how you came into possession of my ring?" and he pointed to the magnificent solitaire which gleamed upon her left forefinger—the identical jewel he had been relieved of by Captain Crimson Cowl.

"Your ring?" Reckless Ruth ejaculated, in astonishment. "Why, this isn't your ring!"

"Perhaps not, just at present!" was the reply, "but it *was* my ring, up to the time of the stage robbery, a few days ago, when I was deprived of it by the road-agent, Captain Crimson Cowl!"

"Indeed, sir, but there must be some mistake. It must have been a ring that looks like this, which you lost. This was made a present to me!"

"I am sure there is no mistake," Dick persisted. "If you will take the trouble to remove the ring, you will find two D's engraved on the inside of the band."

"Yes, there are such initials there. But, I thought you said your name was Jim Jones. D. D. doesn't stand for Jim Jones, by a long shot!"

"Perhaps not!" Dick smiled. "There is such a thing, however, as a man having more than one name, as you yourself suggested."

Reckless Ruth did not reply, at once, but surveyed him, inquiringly; then a light of comprehension seemed to dawn upon her.

"I see! I see!" she said. "There were but three persons in the coach, besides the road-agent, when the robbery took place. James Monte and daughter, constituted two of that three. The third person called himself Deadwood Dick. You must, accordingly, be that man."

Dick smiled again.

"Exactly!" was his brief response.

"Then, I know you!" Ruth assured. "I have heard of you a number of times. I suppose you know you are accused of being accessory to that stage robbery?"

"Yes, so I am aware, but, that don't trouble me. I am amply able to prove that I am a U. S. detective, instead of a road-agent, and I shall make it a part of my Gunnison mission, to hunt down this road-agent, and bring him to justice."

"You will, eh?"

"Certainly."

"Well, of course you know your own business, but if I were in your place I'd let out that job to some one else!"

"Indeed? Why so?"

"Because, from all I can hear, this Crimson Cowl is a desperate character, and if you go to nosing around after him, you're liable to get yourself into a trap!"

Dick looked her straight in the eye.

"Do you mean that as a threat?" he demanded in a low tone.

"Certainly not!" she retorted, somewhat resentfully, while a flush dyed either cheek. "Why should I threaten you? I simply wished to warn you of what you might reasonably expect of the wretch, that's all."

"Then, pray excuse me if I entertained, for an instant, a wrong suspicion. But, really, you can hardly blame me when you wear the identical ring I was robbed of by the road-agent—can you, now?"

"Well, I—I don't know as I can," Ruth replied, doubtfully.

"But, are you *sure* this is the ring you lost?"

"Positive."

She eyed him a moment, in silence; then, removing the ring from her finger, she extended it toward him.

"If it is yours, of course it is yours, and you shall have it," she said, impulsively. "Had I known it was yours, or anything about its history, I should not have accepted it from the donor."

"No! I could not think of taking it from you. Its value is comparatively insignificant to me, and I'd much rather see it grace your fair hand. I may, however, wish to borrow it!"

"Wish to borrow it? Pray what for?" and she looked the surprise she felt.

"Because, by its aid, and the assistance of a little head-work, I may be able to lay my hand on Captain Crimson Cowl, whom I have sworn to bring to justice!"

A peculiar expression appeared for a moment on her pretty face, that did not escape the detective's sharp gaze. Then, she abruptly handed him back the ring. "Take it," she said, "and may it be the means of winning for you the success you covet. And, remember, Deadwood Dick, I am your friend,

and will do all in my power to assist you, for I, too, have a reason for wishing to see this Crimson Cowl taken into custody. More, at present, I cannot say!"

"Thank you!" Dick replied, warmly. "I shall be glad to have your friendship, and with your aid I hope to be able to run this road-agent down, soon. The ring, alone, will furnish me a clew to start on, providing you will tell me *how* it came into your possession!"

Again her cheeks became flushed and a half-frightened look stole into her eyes.

"Oh! really, you hadn't ought to ask me that, sir," she replied. "I wouldn't want to tell you, as it might get the person into trouble, who, I am sure, came into possession of the jewel honestly."

"Oh! it was a man, who gave you the ring, then?"

"Y-e-s, sir—a gentleman, who is not only a prominent citizen, but enjoys a prominent social distinction, and is esteemed by every one. He has been paying his addresses to me, and when my birthday occurred, a few days ago, he gave me the ring. He is quite well-to-do, and could have no object in possessing the ring, by unfair means."

At this juncture a man passed by so close to the table that his coat-sleeve brushed the arm of Reckless Ruth. He never looked either at her or at Dick, but sauntered on further into the saloon.

A startled expression had appeared upon the face of the girl sport, however, and hastily excusing herself, she arose from the table, and quitted the bar-room, by the front way.

The man who had brushed by the table, was James Monte, the retired speculator!

CHAPTER V.

A BRAVE RESCUE.

DEADWOOD DICK, to use a slang phrase, had "taken in the whole business."

"Ah!" he thought, after Ruth's departure, "I begin to see a little light glimmering through the clouds. Strange, this adventure, by my word; a pretty girl, undoubtedly with a history, in which Crimson Cowl is in some way connected; a lover who gives away diamond ring presents that he does not own. Heigh-ho! this matter will bear investigation."

There was no chance to begin that night, for Reckless Ruth did not make a reappearance, nor did James Monte.

Dick waited for some time in the saloon; then drawing the diamond ring upon his finger he left the place, and sauntered leisurely toward his hotel, where he speedily retired for the night.

He was up by daybreak, however, and hiring a saddle horse, took a ten-mile gallop about the picturesque neighborhood, to make its acquaintance, as he would have explained, returning for a late breakfast.

After the repast, he seated himself upon the piazza, and while smoking his cigar was disturbed in his cogitations by a woman's terrified scream, a man's hoarse shout, the clatter of horses' feet, and the rattle of carriage-wheels.

A quick glance up the street revealed the cause. Attached to a serviceable carriage, a span of strong-limbed bay horses were coming down the street at a fierce run, the vehicle swaying from side to side, like a drunken thing.

There was but one occupant of this carriage, and she young and pretty and stylishly attired, but now intensely alarmed.

It was Mora Monte!

Clinging desperately to the reins, but being remorselessly dragged beside the carriage, at full length through the dust of the street, was her father, James Monte, in imminent danger of being run over by the carriage-wheels.

The people on the street, were apparently too terrified to offer any assistance; but, not so with Dick Bristol.

His presence of mind was more manifest than at this critical moment.

A flying leap carried him from the piazza into the highway, and, throwing himself in front of the horses, he endeavored, by grasping them by the bits, to check their mad career.

Desperately he struggled with the frightened steeds, but was dragged fully a score of rods before he succeeded in bringing them to a standstill.

As soon as he succeeded in getting them in a measure quieted, he hastened to assist James Monte to his feet.

And a sorry-looking sight the prominent citizen was. Not only was his elegant attire soiled by the dirt, but it was also much torn, while his hands were cut and bleeding, and his nose and face skinned in a shocking manner.

"I trust you are not seriously injured, sir!" Dick said, as he assisted him to arise.

The speculator gave him a searching glance, and replied:

"No, I don't think any bones are broken. If you will kindly turn the horses' heads the other way, and assist me to get into the carriage, I will drive home."

"Certainly!" Dick replied. "But, hadn't you better let some one lead the horses to your residence? They may get away with you, again."

"Oh! no. They'll go all right as long as they are headed for home!"

Accordingly, Dick headed the turnout in the opposite direction, and assisted Monte to a seat in the carriage, receiving from Mora a bow of recognition therefor!

"Thank you!" Monte said, when he was comfortably in his seat. "Have you one of your cards, sir? I may desire an interview with you, after I get fixed up."

Here was an opportunity Dick was nothing loth to improve, so he extended one of his professional cards.

The speculator glanced at it, and appeared somewhat surprised; but, recovering himself, he bowed and said:

"Very well, sir. Good-day!" And he drove away.

The card Dick had given him read as follows:

RICHARD M. BRISTOL,

(DEADWOOD DICK),

U. S. Government Detective,

No. 3030.

After the carriage had rolled away Dick returned to the piazza, the admired of an admiring throng. Seating himself, he lit another cigar, and once more fell into a reverie.

"There's something in the perspective that I can't quite grapple onto yet!" he muttered. "But, I mean to, presently, if my good sense and good luck don't fail me, and I don't hardly believe they will. I rather think this rescue is fortunate, for, apparently, it may have something to do in changing Monte's opinion of me, and that may be highly desirable."

And his surmise proved correct.

Later in the day he was approached by a strapping six-footer, of sandy complexion, who carried a wad of papers in one hand.

"Say, young feller," he called out, approaching Dick, "I reckon you be the chap I'm lookin' fer. You're Deadwood Dick, ain't yer?"

"Well, what of it?" Dick demanded, coolly.

"Because I'm Sam Shortsleeves, the sheriff!"

"How does that concern me?"

"Sam'at, I reckon. I s'pose ye kno' there hes been a reward offered for your arrest."

"Certainly!"

"B'gosh! you take it mighty cool!"

"Why not? There's no sense of getting overheated over a little thing like that."

"Waal, b'gosh, you're a good 'un. But, what I was goin' to say is: I've been directed to put up another sort of bill, an' that you might want to git the first peep at it," and with this, he handed Dick one of the posters which comprised his bundle.

It was not without considerable surprise that Richard viewed the appended notice, which was printed in large type:

"\$1,000 REWARD.

"SPECIAL NOTICE:—I, the undersigned, herby increase the reward offered for the capture of Captain Crimson Cowl, to One Thousand Dollars, and withdraw the offer made for the capture of Deadwood Dick, it having been clearly demonstrated to me that he was in no way connected with the recent stage robbery. Signed:

"JAMES MONTE."

Dick returned the poster to Shortsleeves with a smile.

"All right," he said; "that's as it should be!" And the sheriff departed.

After this move on the part of Monte, Dick rather expected an invitation to pay the speculator a call, but the day wore away and none came, and once more night settled down over the picturesque little mountain city."

CHAPTER VI.

A BAD PIECE OF BUSINESS.

BUT, the events of that day were not yet over. About eight o'clock that evening a stage arrived in Gunnison from over another route than that driven by Sol Slater.

The coach was crowded with passengers, most of whom had the appearance of being well-to-do, and when it became known that only a couple of miles out of town the stage had been held up

by Captain Crimson Cowl, and the passengers forced to disgorge all their valuables, Gunnison, or perhaps more appropriately, its people, fairly boiled over with excitement and indignation.

A posse of armed and mounted men, under the lead of the Sheriff Shortsleeves, immediately set out for the scene of the "halt," but after a long and wearisome search, returned, unsuccessful.

Deadwood Dick was tempted to accompany them, but, on second thought, changed his mind.

"For," argued he, "there's no earthly use of it. This Crimson Cowl is too smart a bird to be captured in this manner. More science and strategy, and less rush and display will have to be brought into requisition, if we capture the fellow. I'll get a good night's sleep, and in the morning take hold of the matter, on my own hook, and if I don't have this paint-the-town-red individual in my clutches, ere long, I shall be very much surprised. In the ring, I fancy, I have the beginning of a very strong clew!"

He was anxious to obtain another interview with Reckless Ruth and so spent a good portion of the evening at Fighting Fargo's place.

But, much to his disappointment, the girl sport did not put in an appearance.

As his funds were getting precariously low, owing to his losses of the previous night, he finally ventured a hand in a faro game, and when he quit, after an hour's play, he stood in a hundred dollars the winner.

This was enough for his immediate needs, and so he adjourned to his room, at the hotel, and retired for the night.

Something not customary with him, he slept until a late hour in the morning, when he was awakened by a rapping upon the door of his room.

Bidding the applicant for admission to wait a moment, he hastily arose and threw on his clothing, when he advanced to open the door. As he did so, he espied a slip of paper which had been shoved under the door, into the room. Curious as to its meaning, he picked it up, and read:

"You'd bet'er postpone that proposed undertaking, if you don't want a free ticket to sheol. People have been known to shuffle off this mortal coil, with their boots on. Capt. C. C."

"Aha!" Dick muttered. "A bluff, eh? Humph!"

And he shoved the note into his pocket.

Then he unlocked and opened the door.

Outside was a hall-boy of the hotel, who handed Deadwood a sealed envelope, and bowing, retired.

Closing the door, Dick sat down on the edge of the bed, and opened the letter, which was addressed to him in a pretty feminine hand.

What he read, was startling, viz:

"MR. RICHARD M. BRISTOL:—

"DEAR SIR:—Please come at once. Papa has been stabbed, during the night, and wants to see you without delay. Say nothing to any one."

"MORA MONTE."

Deadwood Dick's peculiar, long-drawn whistle denoted his surprise.

"Aha! stabbed, eh?" he soliloquized. "Then, instead of lessening, the plot thickens. Richard, my boy, there's work ahead for you, even though you did visit this town merely out of curiosity. So here goes!"

He hastily made his toilet, and then, without waiting for breakfast, he hastened to the Monte residence.

In due time he arrived at a large and attractive modern residence, from whose site one the finest views of mountain landscape was obtainable.

Mora met him as he mounted the veranda, and extended her hands, impulsively.

"I am so glad you have come, Mr. Bristol," she said. "I have been put to my wits' end to know how to act in this unfortunate matter, until papa mentioned you, and then I sent for you without delay!"

"Is Mr. Monte seriously injured?" Dick asked, as he entered the house.

"Oh! I fear so, although our family physician has not given me his opinion."

"Is your father conscious?"

"Yes."

"And the physician with him?"

"Yes. Come, I will take you up-stairs."

"Not yet!" Dick quietly replied. "I would prefer, first, to hear something about the matter from your own lips."

"Very well. Please step into the parlor, and I will tell you what little I know about the matter."

They entered the cosily furnished parlor and became seated.

"It isn't much I have to tell you," Mora said, "but you shall have it as it is."

"It was rather late when I retired last night—very near midnight I think, for papa was out quite late, and I never retire until he returns home."

"I bid him good-night at the door of his room, and then went to my own apartment. I was considerably fatigued, and must have fallen asleep almost immediately."

"It was just three, this morning, by my clock, when I was awakened by the sound of scuffling in the next room, which is my father's. Greatly alarmed, I hastened to his room, but could not gain entrance through the door, it being bolted on the inside."

"I called to him, but got no answer, while the scuffling continued. Then I screamed for the servants and they came and burst the door in."

"But, it was too late. We found poor papa lying in a pool of blood, while the would-be assassin escaped through the open window."

"Although badly wounded, papa cautioned us to silence, and it was not until morning that I gained his consent to send for Doctor Jacques. Then, a little later, he suggested that I send for you, and I lost no time in doing so."

"Is anything missing from the house, in the way of money or other valuables?" the detective asked.

"Not so far as I have been able to discover. The safe has not been tampered with, and I have not missed anything else."

"How was entrance gained to your father's bed-chamber?"

"Through a window which looks out upon the veranda roof. I know of no other way."

Dick nodded.

"Very likely!" he said. "Come! We will visit your father. You say this is your family physician?"

"Oh! yes, for a number of years, and he is a very nice gentleman, too!" Mora assured. "Follow me, and I will show you the way, Mr. Bristol."

And rising, they quitted the parlor, Mora taking the lead.

CHAPTER VII.

GETTING THE CLEW.

ASCENDING a flight of stairs, they entered a partially darkened room, where the odor of drugs was already prevalent.

The room was luxuriously furnished, the bed surmounted with a canopy of satin and lace.

Upon the bed, bolstered up, lay the victim of the attempted assassination, James Monte.

He was as pale as death, and evidently suffering considerable pain, but, recognizing Deadwood Dick, he put forth his hand, with a faint smile.

"Ah! it's you is it, detective?" he said. "I was afraid you wouldn't come, after the unjust suspicions I held toward you!"

"Don't mention that!" Dick replied. "You have already atoned for what harm may have been done. I am sorry and shocked to see you in this plight, Mr. Monte. I trust you are not dangerously injured?"

"Well, I don't know. I've got two nasty knife-thrusts in my left side, and have bled until there isn't much blood left in me. However, I think by keeping quiet, that I'll get along."

"I trust so, sir. I take it that you were surprised by your would-be assassin?"

"Immeasurably so, sir. I had retired for the night, but having some business matters on my mind, did not immediately fall asleep. I was beginning to doze, however, when I heard a noise, and saw there was a man in the room. I immediately sprung out of bed, and made for the bureau, where I keep my brace of revolvers; but the intruder headed me off, and we clinched, after which a desperate struggle for the mastery ensued. My opponent chanced to be the stronger of the two, and getting me at a disadvantage, he drew a knife and stabbed me twice. Then my daughter's scream sounded, and the ruffian took the alarm, and escaped by the window."

"Did you recognize your assailant, sir?"

"I would prefer to speak of that in private," the speculator replied. "Mora, you and the doctor may be excused for a few minutes."

Mora and the doctor accordingly left the room, but, it rather struck Dick that the man of medicine, a tall, rakish-looking individual, was averse to doing so.

When the two had taken their departure James Monte said:

"Now, then, to answer your question. No, I didn't recognize my assailant. The room was so dark that I could not form any accurate idea of

what he looked like. I have, however, two things out of which a shrewd detective might be able to discover a clew. Mora found them on the floor, this morning."

He then drew two articles from under the sheets, and gave them to the detective.

The first, or most noticeable, was a large clasp-knife, with a keen edge, and a rough bone handle, on which was carved the letters "M. M."

The knife was covered with fresh blood-stains, and evidently was the instrument that had given Monte his wounds.

The other article was a piece of woolen cloth, dyed crimson.

"Well, what do you think?" demanded Monte, who had been watching Dick eagerly.

"Why, there's but one construction to be put on the matter. Your nocturnal assailant was Crimson Cowl, the road-agent."

"So I think."

"There's little doubt about it. This piece of cloth must have been detached from his suit, during your struggle."

"Just so."

"Mr. Monte?"

"Well, sir?"

"Who and what is this Crimson Cowl?" and Dick looked the invalid straight in the eye.

An expression of great astonishment swept over the speculator's face.

"Good Heaven!" he ejaculated, "how should I know? I never saw or heard of the man until that day of the stage robbery."

"You know nothing of him, or his antecedents, whatever?"

"Positively nothing!"

"But, he knows you!"

"How so?"

"Didn't he call you by name, and didn't he tell you concerning your money-belt, when we were in the stage-coach?"

"True, as Gospel! I hadn't thought of it. Detective, what under heavens does this all mean?"

"Perhaps we shall be able to get at it, after while. Mr. Monte, you've got an enemy!"

"An enemy! I wasn't aware that I had a real enemy in the world!"

"But you have. The man is Crimson Cowl. His visit here, to-night, wasn't for the purpose of robbery."

"No?"

"I think not. Your safe, I notice, is in the parlor, below stairs. Knowing you as well as he does, he must know where your safe is. If he came here in quest of money, he most likely would have effected an entrance down-stairs."

"Your inference seems plausible. Then, why did he come up here?"

"To murder you, as you slept!"

Monte grew whiter than the sheet which covered him.

"My God! you don't mean it?" he gasped.

"I believe it," was the quiet response. "Now, Mr. Monte, let's understand each other. Did you send for me with a view of enlisting my professional services?"

"Exactly!"

"Very well. I will accept the trust, and I feel great confidence that I can unmask this Crimson Cowl, and bring him to justice."

"By heaven! I hope so. It will be the making of your fortune, and my bank account is at your disposal!"

"Of money matters, we will speak in the future. For the present, I want straightforward answers to a few questions."

"Fire away. You shall have them."

"Very good. I suppose you to be a man who is pretty well-to-do?"

"Yes, I am richer than most people have any idea of."

"In case of your death, who would be most benefited by it?"

"My daughter, Mora!"

"Ah! exactly. I suppose you have no brothers or sisters?"

"None!"

And, just then the detective noticed an uneasy expression upon the speculator's face.

"I suppose your will, then, leaves all to Mora?" Dick pursued.

"Unfortunately I have no will made!" Monte declared, with apparently increasing uneasiness.

"It is something I should have attended to long ago."

"Decidedly. But then it can matter but little. There being no other heirs, Mora would succeed to your wealth in case of your death."

"But, there are other heirs!" Monte declared, hoarsely. "My wife and the twin sister of Mora, are still living!"

"Ah! where?"

"Here in Gunnison!"

"Hum! Just so. You live apart, I take it?"

"Yes, for over two years, we have done so."

"Well! This begins to look a little like a horse of a different color. Mr. Monte, I should like to hear concerning your married life. It may be of more value to me to be thoroughly posted than you can imagine!"

"True!" the speculator assented, thoughtfully, "and I don't know as there is any reason why you shouldn't know all. So I will tell you."

"I married my wife, Felice, a little over nineteen years ago, in New York, directly after she had been divorced from her first husband, a seafaring man. This marriage was the one fatal misstep of my life, for I hadn't been married a year before I found I had linked my life with that of a shrew—a French-woman of ungovernable temper and of vicious passions, whose sole purpose in life seemed to be to make others miserable."

"Two children were born to us—twins. We named them Belle and Mora. Belle took after her mother, in every respect, while Mora was equally my child, in temperament and character."

"Well, for seventeen years, that woman led me a dog's life, and I never knew what it was to realize a moment of peace in my own home. I was rich, when I married her, but she ran through with that; I acquired a second fortune, and that went likewise, and we came to be nearly poor-house poor."

"Finally, I struck it rich again, here in the mines, and for the first time I put on the thumbscrews, and became master. That brought matters to a focus. There was a very hell to pay, for a time; then, finding her power of rule over me gone, she packed up, took Belle with her, and vanished the ranch. Since then, Mora and I have lived alone together with exception of our servants."

Deadwood Dick had listened with intent interest to the narration, and at the same time quietly studied the speaker's face, and the opinion formed was that the story was worthy of credence.

"What became of your wife's first husband, and what was his name, Mr. Monte?"

"His name was Michael Mork, and though of good education, he was a reckless devil. I don't know where he went to—off to sea again, I presume."

"Was there an issue from that marriage?"

"Yes, a girl baby. Mork took charge of it, as Felice didn't want it!"

Deadwood Dick was silent for several minutes; then he said:

"Well, I guess I have asked you about all the questions necessary, for the present, yet, there is one mystery I would like explained!"

"A mystery?"

"Just so. Where, or how did you come into possession of this ring?" and Bristol held up the ring, in full view.

Monte started, violently, at sight of it, and a frown began to gather upon his forehead.

"Where did you get that?" he gasped.

"From Reckless Ruth," Dick replied, coolly.

"I saw it on her finger, at Fargo's, the other night, and instantly recognized it as the one Crimson Cowl removed from my finger, in the stage-coach. I explained the matter to Ruth, and she offered to return it to me, but I simply solicited a loan of it, in hopes that I could find to whom Crimson Cowl had disposed of it, and in that way get on to Crimson Cowl, himself!"

Monte surveyed the detective, admiringly.

"Gad! but you're a cute one!" he declared. "I wouldn't like to be a criminal, and have you on my track, young as you are. But, how in the name of all that is wonderful do you come to know that I ever possessed that ring?"

"You gave it to Reckless Ruth, didn't you?"

"I don't deny it. But, she didn't tell you so?"—this put with considerable anxiety.

"No. I simply drew from her that she got it from a gentleman—she emphasized gentleman—who had been paying her some attentions, and that she had received it as a birthday present."

We were discussing the matter, when you entered, and brushed past her. She looked startled, and immediately afterward excusing herself, left the saloon, as if she was afraid of something; hence, I formed my conclusions, Mr. Monte, I have you!" and Dick laughed, as if enjoying the situation.

"Pshaw!" the speculator said, "Ruthie misconstrues my intentions. I have frequently befriended her, because she has always proven herself to be a brave, noble, honorable girl, who, with no one to look after her, has to take care of herself—literally carries her life and her good name and character in her own hands, in

defiance of the merciless would. That's why Jim Monte has looked out for her!"

Deadwood Dick immediately arose, and took Monte's hand in his own!

"Nobly spoken!" he said, "and, rest assured, sir, that any hand that touches Reckless Ruth, with profane touch, must answer to me! But, enough, of this. I have work to do—work to do for you, and for the sake of your fair daughter. Tell me where you got this ring!"

"With all pleasure, and I hope the information may be the means of helping you to run down this Crimson Cowl, for which, if you succeed, not only will you receive the thousand dollars reward but my eternal gratitude."

"There is a Jew pawnbroker in town, on D—street, with whom I have business dealings, in the way of loaning him money to advance on goods. His name is Levi Lazarus, and you will find him about as intelligent a specimen of the Hebrew race as you will often encounter, and, as I believe a perfectly honest one, though I may be wrong, in that opinion."

"I chanced to drop into the shop, saw the ring, and purchased it at a big price, not knowing it was yours."

"If you will return the ring to Ruthie, when you are done with it, I will pay you double its value!"

Deadwood Dick's face grew suddenly stern.

"Mr. Monte, I am surprised!" he said.

"Surprised? Why, pray?"

"Do you think, certainly, that there is so little of the man about me that I would borrow an article from a lady, and forget to return it?"

"If I did, I'd jump out of the bed, in the condition I am, and kick you!" was the reply.

"So let that drop."

"Very good. Another question, and then, I'm off. Your object, in not letting this affair get abroad?"

"It was Halburton Hayden's suggestion. He is my business superintendent, you know, and is engaged to Mora. I told him about you, and he hinted it would be best to let matters rest until you could be seen. I had the same idea!"

"Good. Preserve the same reticence until you see me again!"

And then, after a hand-shake, Dick took leave of the injured man.

In the lower hall he met Mora, and shook her hands.

"Keep an eye on Doctor Jacques," he said, in a low significant tone, "and don't permit him to be alone in the room with Mr. Monte. There's mischief brewing. Either you be present, or some one you can trust!"

Then, Dick left the house, his brows knitted, and a strange expression upon his handsome face.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE LIGHT AND A NEW LOVE.

"I DON'T like the looks of this Doctor Jacques, at all, and I'll wager every cent I have that he is a thoroughbred scoundrel!"

Such were the thoughts of Deadwood Dick, as he betook himself toward his hotel, after leaving the Monte residence.

"No! there's something deep and villainous about the man, and he would have given considerable, no doubt, if he had been permitted to remain in the room, during my interview with Monte. As for Monte, himself, I am now satisfied that he is all wool and a yard wide. Not until he explained his object in befriending Reckless Ruth did I have this confidence in him."

And Ruth! She has a history, I am sure of it, and I mean to find it out. Does she know aught of Crimson Cowl? If not, why did she speak so bitterly of him, in expressing a desire that I might succeed in bringing him to justice? There's something back, yet, that I have not been able to fathom. I'll go to the hotel, jot down what I have found out, and then—to work!"

As this last thought was passing through his mind he received a light tap upon the shoulder, and wheeled abruptly to find himself in the presence of—Reckless Ruth.

"Well! well!" she ejaculated, her face beaming with smiles, "if you ain't the sourest-lookin' pickle I've seen in months! Whatever is the matter?"

"Nothing in particular," Dick replied. "Did I look very sour? I was simply meditating."

"Your meditations, then, must have been of an unpleasant nature, for you were frowning like a frog in a frying-pan. Conjuring up some scheme to capture Captain Crimson Cowl, eh?"

"No, not exactly!"

"Where were you—up to Monte's?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I saw you go up there. What's the trouble?"

—or did you pay a call, this early, to my fair friend, Mora?"

Dick was for the moment puzzled how to make answer.

"Why did you mention trouble?" he asked.

"Because I saw Doctor Jacques go there, at daybreak—something quite unusual!"

"Ah! You know nothing good of him?"

"No, I do not. I detest the man!"

"I heartily agree with you!" Dick replied.

"But you haven't answered my question," Ruth persisted. "What is the matter, that you and Jacques were both summoned to Monte's?"

Dick hesitated, at which tears sprang to the eyes of the girl sport.

"You don't trust me," she said, in a tone of voice that betrayed inward emotion. "We were to be friends, but you are still mistrustful of me. Very well; be it so!" and she turned to depart.

But the detective seized her by the arm.

"Stop! this is madness!" he said. "Mistrust you, Ruth? Never let that thought enter your mind again. I would trust you with my life. The cause of my hesitation was, because I feared if I were to tell you what has happened, it might overcome you!"

She looked startled, yet curious.

"I don't understand what you mean," she faltered. "Will you please explain?"

"If you wish. James Monte has been nearly stabbed to death!"

She turned white, but preserved her composure to a wonderful degree.

"Why should that news particularly affect me?" she asked.

"It ought to. It was James Monte who gave you my diamond ring."

She colored vividly.

"How do you know, sir? You speak with assurance."

"Of course I do. James Monte confessed the fact to me, with his own lips."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"You told him that I told you who gave it to me!"

"Nothing of the sort. When we were in Fighting Fargo's, you gave yourself away!"

She nodded.

"Yes, I see. You are a detective, Deadwood, and I admire you for your shrewdness and intelligence. Mr. Monte did give me the ring. But, have you found out where he got it?"

"Yes."

She drew a breath of relief at this.

"Oh! I am so glad!" she said. "I was afraid you would try to fasten the stage robbery on him!"

"By no means. He has been as a father to you, and I am going to be as a brother to him."

Again that inscrutable look.

"I am glad," she said, thoughtfully.

"Ruthie?"

"Mr. Bristol?"

"You hope to be Monte's wife, but, before it is too late, let me tell you that will never be."

"He is not dead?"

"No; he will recover. But, you have misconstrued his motives. It is as a father he has befriended you, not as a lover. I tell you this from his own lips, because I would not like to see an unrequited passion get the best of you!"

She listened, with her gaze riveted upon the ground before her.

"Thanks for your frankness," she said, finally. "Perhaps you're right. I was foolish to think he could care for me in any other way than as a parent. No one cares for me."

And again the tears welled to her pretty eyes.

"Don't believe it, Ruth," Dick exclaimed, impatiently, taking her hand in his. "Although I am interested in James Monte's welfare, he is by no means the only man in Gunnison."

She seemed to comprehend the intent of his words, for her cheeks grew rosy, and her gaze once more fell.

There was a tremor in her hand, under Dick's warm pressure; but, realizing her temporary confusion, he abruptly changed the subject.

"Well, Ruthie, I guess you will have to excuse me. I have work to do."

They were standing beside a cabin then, and no one chanced to be in view, very near, upon the street. As if by sudden impulse, Ruth threw her arms about the neck of the detective, and kissed him.

"Don't think me bold or brazen," she said, in a low tone, without relinquishing her embrace, "but I like you more than you may ever understand. I am a creature of impulse, I know, but if you will protect me from injury, I will help you to capture Crimson Cowl!"

Dick was by no means slow in returning the caress.

"Ruthie," he said, "I would protect you with my life. Strangely as we have met, and short as has been our acquaintance, I entertain the same feeling toward you that you entertain toward me. That you can help me capture the bandit, I have no doubt, for I sincerely believe you know more about him than I do, myself!"

Again that inscrutable look appeared on her face.

"What causes you to think that?" she asked.

"I can hardly answer that question, but I formed the impression, perhaps, from the bitterness you expressed, when you hoped I would bring him to justice."

Reckless Ruth was silent, for a moment, and then she said:

"I will tell you what I do know about him, or rather, you can read this, which will explain all I know."

She then drew from her pocket a soiled sheet of paper, written over in a coarse hand, and handed it to the detective.

The following is what he read:

"RECKLESS RUTH:—I know you, and your history. If you do not attempt to frustrate my plans, you will soon be in position where you will have no need to gamble for a living. If you do attempt to frustrate my plans, I will without any compunctions, put a dagger through your heart."

"Yours to the Death,"

"CRIMSON COWL."

After reading this, Deadwood Dick pondered a moment, with knitted brows. Then, he abruptly asked:

"When did you receive this, Ruth?"

"About a month ago. I happened into the post-office, one day, and the clerk handed me this letter. To say it surprised me, would be expressing it mild, Deadwood!"

"So I should presume. How long have you been in Gunnison?"

"A trifle over two years."

"Have you any idea who penned this letter?"

"Not the slightest."

"How do you like the tone of the letter?"

"Not at all. It don't fit me worth a cent. If I could see the man, I would shoot him as quick as look at him. A man who threatens me had best look out for himself!"

"Good for you, Ruth! But it is self-evident that this man knows you, and something of your past!"

"Yes, it would seem so."

"Exactly; and now, Ruth, you have a history, and for the sake of clearing up the mystery surrounding this Crimson Cowl, I would respectfully ask you to tell me some of the main incidents of your career, from your earliest remembrance, up."

She was silent and thoughtful, for a moment; then she seized the detective's hand.

"You shall have my history," she answered, "but not here. We are too conspicuous, and the observed of at least one observer. You see the cabin on yonder slope?"

"Yes!"

"Very well. Come there by a round-about way, two hours from now, and you shall hear the history of Reckless Ruth."

"But, to whom do you refer as the observer?" Dick asked, eagerly.

"Don't look, 'til I am gone. At the window of the hotel near by, sits a young woman, who has been watching us closely. She hates me worse than the Satan hates holy water. Remember, two hours from now. But be cautious! I have borne an unblemished reputation in this town, and I would not like to have a gentleman be seen entering my cabin."

"Perfectly right you are. I will allow no one to see me. But, who is this lady to whom you refer?"

"Belle Monte!"

"Ah!"

That was all the detective had occasion to say, for Reckless Ruth turned, abruptly, and walked away.

Dick then made his way leisurely toward the hotel.

CHAPTER IX.

BELLE MONTE'S WARNING AND RUTH'S STORY.

"HANG it, am I in love again? It strikes me pretty hard that something is out of gear with my pulsometer, for every time I meet Ruth, I feel mighty queer. Bless the girl! I believe she loves me, short as has been our acquaintance, and, blame me if I don't know her past before I make another move in the Crimson Cowl case, for I believe she is, somehow, mixed up in it!"

Such were the thoughts of Dick Bristol as, an hour later, he sat upon the hotel veranda, enjoying a poor cigar, one of the things for which the great mineral State of Colorado is noted.

But the musings of the detective were destined to be cut abruptly short, for one of the call-boys of the hotel came out, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Lady wishes to see you, sir!"

"A lady?"

"Yes, sir. In the parlor, up-stairs."

"All right. I'll be there, directly."

The boy disappeared, while Dick sat a moment, in thought.

"It must be the dame who was watching Ruth and me, out of the window," he mused. "And that was Belle Monte. Well, I suppose I must interview Miss Belle."

Accordingly, he went up-stairs to the ladies' parlor, where he found a remarkably pretty young lady, who was seated at the window, but who immediately arose, and placed him a chair.

"Pray be seated, sir," she said pleasantly, "for I take it you are the gentleman I sent for—Mr. Deadwood Dick?"

"That's the title I sail under," Dick replied.

"My name is Belle Monte, daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Gunnison. You were pointed out to me, and I was strongly impressed with your appearance—so much so, in fact, that I felt it incumbent on me to give you a little advice."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. About an hour ago I chanced to see you in conversation with a character called Reckless Ruth."

"Well?"

"Are you aware that you were disgracing yourself in the eyes of the public by being seen in the company of that woman?"

"No, I was not aware of it," Dick replied. "On the contrary, I am surprised at the idea of such a supposition or inference."

"That may be, but that woman is not fit company for such a man as you, if, as I suppose, you are a gentleman, and a man of honor. I simply tell you this, because you appear to be a stranger in town. That woman is a thief—aye! even worse!—and a consort of one of the worst and most desperate characters in Colorado, namely, Crimson Cowl, the road-agent. Therefore, as I understand, you are a detective, this bit of information may be of value to you."

"Most assuredly," Dick assented, but in his heart of hearts, he was tempted to make a far different answer. "But, I am astonished at this revelation. I thought Reckless Ruth the soul of honor."

"Oh! she has a pretty face, but a panther's nature. If you have any doubt that I am telling you the truth, maintain social relations with her for awhile, and you will find, to your bitter cost, that your adviser was right. No one but the gamblers of the town will associate with or recognize her."

"Indeed? Well, Miss Monte, I am glad you have posted me in this matter. I shall surely keep my eyes open in the future. By the way, Miss Monte, are you a daughter of Mr. James Monte, the retired speculator?"

"What caused you to think that?"

"Because the name of Monte is one not often met with, and having heard of James Monte, I naturally presumed you might be his daughter, or else, a close connection."

"I am his daughter, unfortunately, but mother and I are separated from him because he is a double-dyed villain!"

"Ah! I see. Please excuse me for attempting to pry into your family affairs. One will make a blunder, often, in spite of himself. By the way, since you have voluntarily given me so much good advice, perhaps you might be able to give me a little more. Hotel life is particularly distasteful to me, and I am in quest of a boarding-house. I seek a home-like place, where I can have the family freedom and feel at ease. Perhaps you might be able to recommend me to such a place."

Miss Belle Monte remained silent for perhaps two minutes, but her eyes glittered in a peculiar way, that did not escape the attention of the observant Richard.

Then she brightened up.

"Yes, I think I do," she answered. "Will you remain here for about five minutes?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Very well. I am of the opinion I can fix you out in a satisfactory manner."

She then arose and left the parlor.

"The kettle begins to boil," Dick muttered. "Let her boil! I'm not a very bold ranger, but I think I'm pretty nearly on the trail."

In exactly five minutes Miss Belle returned.

"We can just suit you," she announced, with apparent enthusiasm. "Mamma has a spare room, and our table is second to none in the city. The terms are \$10 per week."

"Very well. You can consider me your boarder," Dick assured her; "but as I do not get in usually until rather late in the evening, can you give me a key and tell me where I will find my room?"

"Oh, certainly! I was thoughtful of that. Here is the front-door key, and you will find your room, the door of which directly faces the top of the stairs, open. Our house is Number 36 S—street."

"Thanks!" Dick said, taking out a roll of money and handing her a ten-dollar note. "I will be there to-night. Do you breakfast early?"

"At seven."

"That will suit. I suppose you have other boarders?"

"Only one—Mr. Mason."

Dick then arose, after glancing at the clock on the mantle—for his watch was one of the things of the past, since the stage-robbery.

"You will have to excuse me," he said, "as I have some business to attend to."

"Oh, certainly! Do not let me detain you."

Dick left the parlor.

"Things are working lovely," he muttered, when he was once more seated on the hotel piazza. "I shall now have an opportunity to form an opinion in regard to Felice Monte's feelings toward her husband, for, as I live, I believe she is in some way concerned in the stabbing affair, as well as in this man Crimson Cowl."

Soon after he set out in a roundabout way for the cabin of Reckless Ruth, whose history he desired to know before further investigating the Crimson Cowl case.

He succeeded in reaching and gaining admission to the cabin home of the girl sport, who greeted him pleasantly.

"I see you are on time," she said, with a smile.

"Oh, yes; I usually try to be prompt," was the reply. "Men of my profession need to be."

They chatted for a while, and then Deadwood Dick remarked:

"And now, if it will not be asking too much of you, I'd like to hear the story of your life—from childhood, up."

"Very well, you shall have it, although I doubt if it will prove interesting to you, as it is not very romantic."

"Perhaps I may make more out of it than you think for," Dick encouraged. "I'm quite handy at putting this and that together."

"Well, to begin with, my earliest remembrance dates back to when I was about five years old. I was then upon a big ship, on the ocean, with my father. The ship was one that traded between the East Indies and the United States, and my father was first mate, but aught of my mother I never knew."

"From the time I was five, until I was thirteen, my life was spent almost entirely on ship-board, for we seldom touched port more than long enough to take on or discharge a cargo. When I was thirteen I landed at New York, my father shook me, and told me to shift for myself, and he went off to sea again, for which I was not sorry as he had become a very disagreeable master."

"I had a little money, and plenty of grit, and you can bet I didn't starve, or go to ruin. I started in at selling button-hole bouquets in front of the theaters, and succeeded in getting a tolerably fair living. I finally got tired of New York, however, and since then I have drifted about here and there through the States and Territories, always earning my living in various ways. That is my history, as far as I know it."

"Have you never heard from your father since he discarded you?"

"Never, nor do I ever want to, for he always abused me shamefully, and I was not sorry when he sent me adrift."

"What was his name, if I may ask?"

"All the name I ever knew him by was Mike Mork, but I never believed it was his own real name, because it was such a strange one!"

Dick started, as his mind reverted to his interview with James.

"Mike Mork, eh?" he mused. "That was the name of Felice Monte's first husband. Reckless Ruth, then, is the daughter of Felice! By my soul! matters are growing interesting!"

Ruth's sharp eyes immediately noticed his apparent surprise, for she spoke up eagerly:

"Did you ever hear the name before?"

"Yes, and since I have been in Gunnison, More I cannot tell you, until I have had a

chance to figure on the matter. I will tell you, however, that I think I have struck a clew!"

"A clew? How do you mean?"

"To the identity of Crimson Cowl!"

"Ah! But you do not suspect—"

"But I do, though! I suspect that Michael Mork is in Gunnison, and that he and Crimson Cowl are one and the same person!"

Ruth looked startled.

"What in the world ever causes you to form such an opinion?" she asked.

"The fact of Crimson Cowl's threatening letter to you. The fact that he apparently knows you and your past history, as he claims, would seem to argue that he is your parent."

"The letter sounds like my father, it's true," Ruth said, thoughtfully, "for many's the time my father used to threaten my life. Perhaps your surmise is correct!"

"I think it is," Dick declared. "In fact, I think I am getting on to the edge of a heinous plot, and I shall follow it to the bitter end. Do you think you would recognize your father's handwriting?"

"Yes, but he did not write the letter to me, unless he disguised his hand."

"Which he may have done. Does *this* look anything like his writing?" and from his pocket he drew the scrap of paper found under the door, that same morning.

Ruth took the extended slip and examined it.

"Yes, that is very much like the way my father used to write!" she answered, without hesitation. "I would recognize it almost anywhere."

"Then, I will venture to assure you that I am hot on the trail!" Dick informed her. "I must leave you, now, for I have other investigations to make, and no time is to be lost. If you wish to assist me you have but to say the word, and I will place you in position to do so."

"With all my heart, Deadwood!"

"Very well. Have you a pen, ink and a sheet of paper handy?"

"Yes."

"Let me have them. James Monte needs a nurse, and *you* must act in that capacity."

"I?"

And the color once more surged vividly to her cheeks.

"Yes, you! He must be *guarded*. Don't be foolish, Ruth. He is only as a father to you. He is in great danger, and must be guarded, constantly, while I am working. You and Mora must be the guard. That Jacques is a snake, and needs watching!"

"I agree with you!" she assented. "Go on!"

"Well, you or Mora must be with Monte constantly, and Jacques must not be left alone with him for an instant. This is imperative!"

"I am ready to abide by your orders."

"I will write a letter to Monte, and you are to deliver it to Mora cautioning her that she is to give it, after reading it herself, to her father, but that Dr. Jacques is not to be in the room when her father receives it. The letter will contain all necessary explanations as regards you. Are you personally acquainted with Mora?"

"Yes, indeed. We are very good friends."

"So much the better. Now, the writing materials, please!"

Ruth produced them without delay, and Dick penned the following letter:

"MR. JAMES MONTE:—"

"I sincerely hope that when you receive this your condition will be greatly improved. It may comfort you to know that I am *hot on the trail*, and that developments are coming to light, surprisingly fast."

"But, you are in deadly peril, and must have a constant guard. I send you Ruth, who must act with Mora, as your nurse. *Under no circumstances allow yourself to be left alone with Jacques.* If you do, I shall throw up the sponge! Either Mora or Ruth must be with you constantly. Refuse all medicine. If you find your strength failing, a little brandy will do you more good than Jacques' medicine. Let no one prepare or serve your food except Mora or Ruth. Obey this, and I will bring you around all right. But, refuse to heed it and I would not give a red for your chances. As I remarked, I am hot on the trail, and in a short time shall be ready to expose the murderous conspiracy that is being worked against you. I send this by Ruth, who understands all."

DEADWOOD DICK."

This note Dick handed to Ruth, and said:

"Read that, and then after making any necessary preparations, take it to Mora. Go beelied, and be unrelaxing in your vigilance!"

"I will, you may be sure," she replied, slowly—"for your sake, if for nothing more!"

"Thank you! I may or may not visit Monte again to-day, but will do so to-morrow. So until we meet again, good-by!"

He raised her hand to his lips, and then quietly left the cabin, and made his way in the same

roundabout course, back into the heart of the town.

"So far, the goose hangs at a tolerably fair altitude," he decided. "Now, for Levi Lazarus, the pawnbroker, and the diamond ring racket! I may be able to elicit some information from that source. If so, I shall certainly be lucky. Mr. Michael Mork—Crimson Cowl, I'm after you hotter than a goose with a new litter of goslings!"

CHAPTER X.

LEVI GIVES THE NAME.

INQUIRING the way, Deadwood Dick paid a visit to the business headquarters of Mr. Levi Lazarus, pawnbroker.

The place proved to be a substantial two-story building in whose window was exhibited a motley array of articles which had been "shoved up" for a few cents or dollars, as the case might be.

The odor of garlic and onions clung about the interior, which was presided over by a rather comely looking Jewish maiden, whose face betrayed more than average intelligence.

The shop evidently had plenty of patrons, for the shelves were full of parcels, while the stock of fire-arms and knives was something surprising.

Dick took a swift glance about the shop, and then stepping up to the counter, addressed the young woman.

"Is Mr. Lazarus in?" he asked, pleasantly.

"He is not," was the reply, in good English.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

"Well, that depends somewhat. Do you usually attend to business, here?"

"Yes, sir, a great deal of the time."

"Well, I have a little matter in hand which I would like explained. You no doubt have heard of Sol Slater's stage being robbed by a road-agent, some days ago?"

"Yes, sir, I have heard of it."

"Well, I was passenger on that coach, and the road-agent relieved me of a valuable diamond ring, which I have since found in possession of a young lady of this town. She received it from a gentleman acquaintance, and he states that he bought it here. Now, to aid me in running down this road-agent—for I may as well inform you that I am a detective—I want to know how you came into possession of the ring?"

"Will you allow me to see the ring?" she asked.

"Certainly," and Dick took it from his finger and gave it to her.

She examined it carefully, and then shook her head.

"I don't think we ever had the ring," she declared.

"Oh! yes, you did," Dick returned, confidently. "James Monte gave me assurance that he purchased it here."

"Well, here comes father, now! Perhaps he can tell you more about it than I."

At this juncture a heavy-set man, who looked every inch a Hebrew of the pure stock, entered the store and passed behind the counter.

"Father, can you give this gentleman any information concerning this ring?" the daughter asked.

"What ring ish dot?" and the Jew took the handsome circlet, and subjected it to a critical examination. "Where you get this?" he demanded, surveying Dick narrowly.

"That is precisely what I want to know of *you*!" was the decided reply. "Where did *you* get it before you sold it to James Monte?"

"Who dells you I sold it to James Monte?"

"I got it from Mr. Monte personally, sir," Dick replied.

"Vel, I gonfess I did sell it to Monte. But I comes py id perfectly honest. Id vas pawned mit me."

"Who by?"

"I don't make it a rule to gif away the names of mine customers, mine frient. Id ish a poor pizness man vot do dot."

"Indeed! Well, my Hebrew friend, you'll find it necessary to break your rule for once!" said Dick, exhibiting his detective badge.

"Vot!—vot ish dot?—you are von detec-tives?"

"That's about the size of it!"

"But, mine frient, I come py dis ring square, as I am an honest man. I pay big money for dis ring."

"That's none of my business. What I want to know is, *who* gave you the ring?"

"Vel, id vas a young lady. She come to me an' tell me how she vas hard up, an' vants to sell me dot ring for fifty dollar; so I take pity on her an' gif her forty, an' tell her she can haff it

back when she give me fifty. She say she neffer call for it, so I sell id to Meester Monte for thirty-five. So you see I lose five dollar by the speculation!"

"Oh! that's a likely story!" Dick exclaimed, contemptuously. "It's a cold day when a pawnbroker beats himself, you bet! What is the name of the young lady of whom you got the ring?"

"Mine frient, I could not dell you, for she did not gif me her name!"

"Get out! Look here, Levi, you don't want to fool me, for I'm business clean to the back-bone, and won't tolerate any monkey business, you can bet. The ring was stolen from me by Crimson Cowl, the road-agent, and by him or some agent of his was disposed of to you. It is not unlikely at all that you have been acting as a "fence" for the disposal of Crimson Cowl's plunder, and now, my worthy Levi, if you don't want me to land you in jail, you'd best act like a sensible man. If you don't tell me the name of the party who gave you that ring off, to the lock-up you go!"

Both Lazarus and his daughter looked greatly alarmed, and the former turned anxiously to the latter:

"Rachel, mine shildt, do you remember if der young lady mentioned her name? If she did, I haff forgotten de fact, so helb me gracios!"

"Yes, she said her name was Belle Monte!" Rachel replied. "I met her outside the store, just after she pawned the ring, and we had a chat together."

"Has she been in the habit of pawning things here, before?" demanded Dick, whose surprise was complete.

"No, she has not."

"Very well. Let me advise you in the future to be careful whom you make loans to, if you don't want to get into trouble!" Dick advised.

And then, he left the store.

"One by one the links connect!" he muttered. "So Belle Monte disposed of it, eh? I should hardly feel disposed to believe this had not she shown her true nature by her attack on Reckless Ruth. She sold or pawned the diamond, and therefore is consorting with Crimson Cowl. Crimson Cowl and Mike Mork, the father of Ruth, are without doubt, one and the same. Mike and Felice were once man and wife. What is more natural than that they are reunited. If so, here is a trio of rascals working together: for, from Monte's story, Felice is none too good to bear watching. If, as I believe, three are pitted against James Monte, their object is but too apparent. Monte is a man of considerable wealth. If he were to depart this life, without making a will, his two daughters would share and share alike in his fortune and this wife have her dower. That settles the whole business. The wife and Belle, in conjunction with Mike Mork, are concerned in a conspiracy against James Monte. Be it so, but as sure as my name is Dick Bristol, I'll frustrate their schemes, and bring them to justice."

Such were the thoughts of Deadwood Dick as he made his way toward the hotel.

But, his thoughts were destined to be interrupted, for, just as he arrived in front of Fighting Fargo's saloon, a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he was wheeled around, facing the toughest-looking specimen of the *genus* border ruffian he had seen in many a day.

"Hold up, thar, me bloomu' daisy," the rough ordered. "Et kinder strikes me you're ther feller I'm lookin' for, an' I've got a bone to pick with you. By way o' interdooce, I'm Henhawk Hank, ther hummin' hurricane o' the mines. No keerds!"

CHAPTER XI.

A LIVELY RECEPTION AND A SQUEEZE IN THE DARK.

MR. HENHAWK HENRY was an individual whose personal beauty no one could reasonably envy.

His hawk like visage, reddened by the excessive use of strong drink, had evidently recently undergone the siege of a battering-ram, or a butcher's beef-steak pounder, for it was a mass of rawness, and his matted grizzly beard was not free from the stains of recently spilt blood. His eyes were bloodshot, his hatless head had recently lost a tuft of hair, and one eye was elaborately frescoed in mourning.

In physique he was a man of superb build, and evidently a very gladiator in point of strength and endurance, but his greasy, slouchy raiment, together with his ugly countenance, tended to give him a most unsightly appearance.

As he uttered the remarks quoted in the preceding chapter, he stood, with arms akimbo,

and in a half-squatting posture, a diabolical leer upon his distorted visage.

Dick surveyed the man, if man he could be called, for a full minute; then he burst into a laugh.

"Well! my friend, what's bitin' you?" he asked.

"I ain't yer friend, and ther's nothin' bitin' me!" was the retort. "I'm high cockolorum of this hyer town, an' I've got a bone to pick with you!"

"Is that so? Where is that particular offendin' bone located, may I ask?"

"That nose of yourn, durn yer picture!"

"So? Why, what's my protocosis done, to offend your highly sensitive nature?"

"'Cause et's allus pokin' into other folkses business, ye cussed loafer!"

"See here, you big bloat, be a little more guarded in your remarks, if you please!" Dick observed, coolly. "In what way have I aroused your ire? Upon my word I never saw your beautiful phiz before!"

"You ain't, hey?"

"Positively not!"

"What's ther reason yer bin lyin' about me, then?"

"I've not been lying about you!"

"You're a liar! You've been tellin' around as you allowed I were Crimson Cowl, ther road-agent, and I'm goin' to make ye chaw yer words. We all know ye'r a detective, but, thet don't make no odds. Ye can't make no lies about me."

"I have not lied about you, never saw you before, nor ever had anything to say about you!"

"Oho! you crawfish, do ye?"

"Nary craw. If you're spoiling for a fight, you can have it, on application!"

Henhawk Hank glared at the detective for a moment with demonish fury; then turned to a group of half-a-dozen rough-looking customers, who had gathered close at hand.

"Ain't et so, boyees?" he roared. "Hain't this cuss been lyin' about me?"

"In course he has!" came the prompt reply, in a chorus of voices.

"I know'd it!" bawled Henhawk, "an' I'm goin' to make an example of him. Here goes!" and, with a growl resembling that of an infuriated grizzly, he made a rush for Deadwood Dick. The crowd, which had quickly augmented in numbers, was destined to witness a conflict that had never had an equal, in the annals of Gunnison.

One well-planted blow from the fist of the detective laid the Henhawk flat upon his back; and then, as others of his gang rushed forward, to avenge the downfall of their comrade, they were received with sledge-hammer blows that would have done credit to the great American slugger.

In less than three minutes, the fight was over, and a baker's half dozen of would-be bruisers lay in strikingly uncomfortable attitudes in the street, while the invincible Deadwood, without a blemish, stood ready to accommodate a fresh onslaught.

But, he was not destined to remain so, long.

Four strong arms lifted him, bodily, and bore him within Fighting Fargo's saloon.

One of the parties was Fighting Fargo, himself an Apollo in stature and strength, as well as in manly qualities; the other was a handsome young fellow of six-and-twenty, finely formed, and evidently possessed of strength equal to that of the gambler.

Upon being stood upon his feet, Deadwood Dick surveyed the two, for a moment, in silence.

Then he said:

"Well, gents, how am I to understand this unceremonious proceeding—aggressive, or otherwise?"

"Hardly aggressive!" Fighting Fargo replied. "A man who can lick a dozen as tough men as Henhawk Hank, is hardly the man to be aggressive toward, although I am something of a fighter myself. You're the best man I've seen in many a day, and we've brought you in to wine you!"

"Thank you," Dick replied. "I don't often indulge, but, considering the clever way you handled me, I shall be proud to touch glasses with you!"

"Very well. We will adjourn, then, to my private office," Fargo said; "and, allow me to make you acquainted with my friend, Mr. Hal Hayden, superintendent of Monte's Acme Mine."

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Hayden," Dick said, as the two shook hands. "I have heard of you through Mr. Monte, himself."

"And I am equally pleased to meet you," Hayden replied, modestly.

The trio then adjourned to a private room, and Hayden took up the conversation.

"Did you visit Mr. Monte, this morning, Mr. Bristol?"

"I did," Dick replied.

"Bad business isn't it?"

"You are right!"

"I presume Mr. Monte intrusted the matter to you, for investigation?"

"He did."

"What did you make out of it, so far?"

"I think I am on the right trail. That's about all I can tell you at present."

"I hope you are on the right trail. I have often heard of you, and have reliance in your skill as a detective. It rather strikes me your suspicions center toward Crimson Cowl, the road-agent. Am I not right?"

"Yes. I have not a doubt about it. By the way have you any idea who this knight of the road really is?"

"No, I cannot say that I have. He is certainly a daring cuss, whoever he is."

"Yes, and there is a deadly conspiracy on foot, against Mr. Monte. Of that I am sure. What do you know about Belle Monte, Mr. Hayden?"

Hayden hesitated a moment, before giving an answer.

"Well, I can't truthfully say that I know much," he replied. "She's a person I never took any fancy to, although she has persisted in throwing herself in my way, and endeavoring to win my attention."

"I understand you're in favor with her sister, however?"

"Well, perhaps!" Hayden admitted, coloring.

"Yes, there's a pretty lively prospect of a wedding, ere long," Fighting Fargo spoke up, "and a right royally good match it will be, too."

"So I should presume!" Deadwood Dick assented. "By the way, Mr. Hayden, are you acquainted with Doctor Jacques?"

"Slightly, though I never sought to cultivate his acquaintance, to any considerable extent, as I never took a liking to the man."

"You are like me, in that respect. Do you know anything in particular about him?"

"Well, no—no more than it has struck me, often, that he was a snake-in-the-grass."

"Do you know whether he is acquainted in the grass-widow division of the Monte family?"

"He is. I have heard it remarked that he was paying lovely attention to Belle Monte, although I cannot vouch for the truth of the report."

The subject then changed to other and more commonplace matters, after which the little party broke up.

Dick went directly to the residence of James Monte, where he was admitted by Mora.

"How is your father?" was the first question.

"No better, I fear," was the reply. "He complains of failing strength, while Doctor Jacques shakes his head as if in grave doubt as to his recovery. Oh, sir, if my father were to die, it would kill me!"

"Take courage. We're not going to let him die, by any means! Has Ruth come?"

"Yes, and she is with papa, now. I am so glad you sent her."

"I thought you would be. One or the other of you are with him, constantly, I suppose, according to my directions?"

"Yes, sir."

"How does Doctor Jacques cotton to the new order of things?"

"He seems to be considerably nettled, but says nothing. Do you suspect him of any complicity in the plot against my father, sir?"

"Perhaps. Do you know what sort of medicine he is giving your father?"

"Chiefly opiates, to relieve the pain; at least so he says."

Deadwood Dick nodded.

"In powders, I presume?"

"No, on the contrary, in liquid form."

"Very well. Watch your opportunity, and secure a small sample of this liquid for me without the doctor's knowledge. You will be on duty to-night?"

"Yes!"

"Very well. You will want to have a revolver ready for use, in case of any unforeseen emergency. I will go up and see your father, now."

And, accordingly, the detective sought Mr. Monte's bedchamber.

The wounded man, deathly pale, lay with his eyes closed, on Dick's entrance, but the eyes quickly opened, as the detective crossed the

room, and a faint smile of recognition came upon the pallid face.

Ruth was seated near the bed, glancing over the pages of a novel; Dr. Jacques was asleep upon the sofa.

"Well, Mr. Monte, how are you feeling?" Dick asked, as he seated himself by the bedside.

"Not so well as earlier in the day," was the reply. "I seem to be losing strength continually."

"I am sorry to hear that, sir. Strength is more than half the cure in a case of this kind. Have you been able to take any nourishment?"

"Oh! yes, but it has not appeared to strengthen me any."

"I am sorry to hear that, too," Dick said. "What sort of stuff has the doctor been giving you?"

"Simply opiates, to allay the pain. He says that is about all that can be done, as nature will have to take its course. I think he has serious doubts of my recovery, although he will not admit the fact."

"Well, you must keep up courage, and I guess you will pull through O. K."

"Have you been looking into the matter of the attempt to assassinate me?"

"Yes, and think I have made pretty fair progress, too. I cannot tell you more at present, than that a diabolical conspiracy is on foot to put you out of the way. But I'll frustrate that, never fear. How do you like your new nurse?"

"Tip-top. It was a happy and a wise thought of yours to send Ruth to Mora's assistance, and I thank you for it. Ruth makes a capital nurse, and shall be well paid for her services."

"Oh! of course. We have no doubt about that!" Dick responded. "I thought you would find her useful and attentive. I must be going, now, and on my return to-morrow morning, I hope to find your condition much improved. It is not improbable that I may have some news for you on the morrow, that will be a source of great surprise to you."

Dick took his departure, and returned to his hotel, where he remained until a late hour that evening, when he set out for the residence of Mrs. Monte.

It was located on the outskirts of the town, and he found it to be a large two-story cottage, of recent erection, although its outer appearance was yet somewhat in the rough.

The house was dark, when Dick reached it, which seemed to indicate that the occupants had retired for the night; so he unlocked the door with the key given him and entered a hall that was filled with Egyptian darkness.

A search of his pockets failed to discover a match, and nothing was left for him to do but softly close the door, and grope his way to his room, for he remembered Belle Monte had told him that it was directly at the head of the stairs.

Following the wall as a guide, he found and ascended the stairs, but, scarcely had he more than reached the upper landing, than a pair of heavy hands closed around his throat, in a vise-like grip, and proceeded to choke him.

CHAPTER XII.

IN A PRETTY BAD FIX.

DEADWOOD DICK was so taken by surprise that, for the moment, he failed to defend himself.

The clutch upon his throat was so powerful that it immediately stopped his breath, and he knew it was the intention of his assailant to choke him to death.

The Stygian darkness made it impossible to see his unknown enemy, but realizing his imminent peril, he struck out with all his strength.

Luckily, his iron fist caught the assailant full in the face and staggered him, at the same time eliciting a terrible oath; but the grasp about the throat seemed, if anything, to increase in tenacity.

Dick struck another fearful blow, at which the grip on his throat was relinquished, and his assailant, whose back was toward the staircase, went crashing down the stairs, end over end.

Dick quickly entered the room in front of him, the door of which he found open, and groping about, struck a table on which a lamp and some matches had been placed.

He lost no time in lighting this lamp, and then going out into the hall, he flashed the light down the stairs, expecting to see his unknown assailant at the foot of the flight. But no one was there; the lower hall was empty, so far as he could see; the man had vanished.

"Guess he wasn't much hurt, and has skipped!" was Dick's thought, although he was considerably surprised.

He was standing on the upper landing, gazing down into the lower hall, when he felt a touch upon his arm.

A woman stood near him, attired in a flowing night-robe. In one hand she grasped a cocked revolver, which was leveled full at Deadwood Dick's head.

She was a tall, thin, angular woman of middle age, with pinched features, vicious expression, and jet-black eyes and hair.

The eyes had a peculiar glitter, as she nervously fingered the trigger of her weapon.

"Who are you, sir, and what are you doing here?" she demanded, harshly. "Speak quick, before I blow your brains out!"

"Easy, now!" Dick replied, coolly. "I am your new boarder, Deadwood Dick."

"You are? Well, what was the racket out here just now? I thought the house was coming down!"

"The racket was this," Dick replied. "I was coming up to my room, and had just reached this landing, when I was seized by the throat by some one—a man, presumably, judging by the strong grip—and an attempt was made to choke the life out of me. Not being quite prepared to shuffle off this mortal coil, I gave the strangler two heavy blows in the face, the last knocking him head over heels down-stairs."

"This is incredible, sir! What kind of a looking man was he?"

"It was so dark here that I couldn't make him out."

"But, where is the man? I see no signs of him."

"Nor I. He must have made his escape while I was procuring this lamp."

"This is all very strange," Mrs. Monte said. "I cannot understand how any stranger could have been in my house, as everything was securely locked up before I retired. Will you please go down-stairs and look around? I will join you in a moment."

"Certainly!" Dick replied, and accordingly, with the lamp in one hand and a revolver in the other, he descended the stairs and proceeded to make a reconnaissance.

"There's rascality here," he muttered. "I'll wager a hat that the cuss who grabbed me by the throat was Captain Crimson Cowl, the road-agent, and he intended to wind up my career there and then. But how came he in Mrs. Monte's house? Was she cognizant of his presence, and was it a plan to put me out of the way that I was offered a room here? By my soul, I believe it! If Crimson Cowl and Mike Mork, Mrs. Monte's first husband, are one and the same person, as I suspect, there's not a doubt that they are in league in the plot against James Monte, and as I may be a stumbling-block in the way of their success, they wanted me out of their way—hence the attack on me. I'll—"

He never finished the sentence. At that instant the lamp was dashed from his hands, causing the light to go out, and then came a stunning blow upon the head that stretched him out upon the floor insensible.

How long he had been unconscious he had no means of knowing, when he once more opened his eyes. He only knew that he had a severe headache, was bound hand and foot, and lying on his back in Stygian darkness.

Moreover, he was lying upon the ground, and judged by the damp air that he was in some underground place.

As his senses gradually came back to him, he remembered perfectly well what had happened.

"Confound the luck, I'm in the power of the enemy at last!" he soliloquized, "and there's no chance of my getting out very soon, as I can see. I wonder where I am, anyhow? In some cellar, I take it, and in the power of Crimson Cowl, and now that I'm out of the way, he and his confederate, Felice Monte, can scheme away, with no one to bother them. I'm lost to the public, and as no one will know what has become of me, no one will take the trouble to look me up, unless, mayhap, it would be Reckless Ruth."

It was a provoking reflection, that, just when the case was progressing so favorably, he should fall into the power of the enemy.

And it was a reflection that Dick had plenty of time to busy his mind with, for no one came near him for what he considered must be fully a day, and he was beginning to wonder if he was to be left to starve, when he discovered a light in the distance—so far away that it looked but a mere speck.

A few minutes served to convince him that the light was coming nearer; later, he saw it emanated from a lantern carried by a man who was coming along what proved to be a long,

subterranean passage, or, what is known in mining parlance as a drift.

The lantern gave forth a strong light, and, as the new-comer drew near, Dick was enabled to get a good view of him, and saw that he was about to receive a visit from Captain Crimson Cowl.

He was well built, and plainly possessed of no mean amount of muscle.

He was clad in a suit of clothes of a crimson color, his hat was likewise red, and the mask upon his face was crimson.

All in all, his gory appearance was something startling.

He came to a halt when he reached the detective, and gazed down at him, his eyes gleaming wickedly through the holes in his mask.

"Well, my gay detective, I see you're alive," he said. "I didn't know but the clubbin' you got had cracked your skull!"

"Not much!" Dick retorted. "My head wasn't made to be broken so easily as that!"

"It wasn't, hey? Well, now, don't be too sure about it, young feller. There's no telling but I may take a notion to knock your brains out. Do you understand?"

"I am not deaf, or dull of comprehension!" was the reply. "You appear to have me in your power, Mister Crimson Cowl, but that does not signify I fear you in the least. It's your turn, now; mine will materialize next!"

"Not much, Mr. Deadwood! You are doomed, as should be all detective dogs. You came here to hunt down Crimson Cowl, did you? Well, you undoubtedly are a smart one but no match for me. Here in this deserted drift, where mineral was never found, you will be left to pay the penalty for incurring my wrath. This place is never visited, for there is nothing more than idle curiosity to attract any one here, and you are beyond hearing distance of the outer world; so you see you're in a bad fix, all of which you deserve. This place is overrun with rats, and no doubt they will find you a dainty morsel to feed upon. How do you like the prospect, meddling fool?"

"I have faced Death many a time before, Mike Mork, and never quailed!" Dick replied, coolly, "and I don't propose to do so now. I warn you, however, that I know you and the diabolical plot in which you and Felice Monte are concerned, and if it is ever my good fortune to get free, you'll have urgent need to look out for me!"

"No danger of your ever getting free!" was the heartless response. "You are so securely bound that there is not the slightest probability of your getting rid of your bonds. Even if you should, it will not be wise for you to ever show your face in Gunnison again, as I will have you shot down, without quarter! But before there is any likelihood of your escaping from here I shall have accomplished my object, and bled myself to the further corners of the earth, while all the rats will have left of you will be your fleshless skeleton. So make the best out of your situation, and reflect how foolish you were when you sought to wage war against Captain Crimson Cowl!"

Then with an evil laugh, the outlaw strode away, taking the lantern with him, and leaving Deadwood Dick once more in darkness profound!

The future did look dark, in truth.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SIZING UP" THE CASE.

ALTHOUGH left alone in that subterranean prison, with a dreadful fate staring him in the face, Deadwood Dick was by no means ready to give up the fight for life.

On the contrary, he felt somewhat more encouraged than before Crimson Cowl's visit.

This was partly owing to two things: one that if he could free himself of his bonds, he would probably have no difficulty in escaping from the drift.

The second cause for congratulation was that his wrists were bound together behind his back with buckskin thongs, and that he had made the discovery, by the lantern light, that, near at hand, was a small puddle of water, caused by the dripping moisture of the rocks on the sides and ceiling of the passage.

By rolling over so that his wrists rested in this water, Dick knew that the thongs would become soaked, and then he could stretch them to a considerable extent, so that perhaps he could free his hands.

No time was to be lost.

Aware that his plans were suspected, if not really known, Mike Mork would lose no time in precipitating matters to a crisis, which, most likely, would be to the personal peril of James

Monte. Hence, whatever was done must be done at once.

Over and over he rolled, until he reached the water and submerged his wrists, and for upward of three-quarters of an hour remained thus all the time, straining to stretch and loosen the buckskin strings.

Slowly but surely they yielded until finally victory was his; his hands were free!

To remove the bonds from his feet was but the work of a couple of minutes, when, once more, he stood erect, master of the situation.

"Aha! I'll stay here to be devoured by rats, will I, Mr. Crimson Cowl?" he chuckled. "Well, I rather guess not. Rats have got no earthly use for me, but prison, if not the gallows, has use for you, and that mighty quick, too! If I'm not greatly mistaken, I won't be long in running off your little ball of yarn!"

His first action, after freeing himself of his bonds, was to examine his clothes. He found that not only had his money, but his watch, ring and detective badge also been taken from him.

The loss of the latter was particularly provoking, as it would materially deprive him of his official power.

He did not stop to fret long over it, however, but proceeded to grope his way out of the drift, in quest of the light and freedom of the outer world.

This was a task which did not require many minutes, and when he once more stood outside the drift, under the blue dome of Heaven, he found that night was just enshrouding the land.

He waited for perhaps half an hour near the mouth of the drift, until it was really dark; then he made his way rapidly toward the residence of James Monte, which he reached without attracting any particular attention.

Rapping on the door, he was admitted by Ruth, who instantly seized him by the hand.

"I am so glad you have come!" she said. "Where in the world have you been so long? We have been greatly worried over your absence."

"So? Why, how long since I was here last?" Dick asked, curiously.

"Nearly forty-eight hours; and Mr. Monte has been inquiring for you almost constantly, while I have searched the town over and over for you?"

"Is Monte worse?"

"Very much so. I have grave doubts if he gets through the night!"

Deadwood Dick's brows knitted in a scowl.

"Curse that Jacques!" he gritted. "Where is he?"

"Gone to supper."

"Then lose no time. Go fetch the best, most reliable lawyer in the town. Mora shall not be cheated! I am onto the whole diabolical plot, and shall frustrate it, even if Monte does die. Go, and when you do return, bring Sheriff Shortsleeves with you also!"

He said no more, but turned abruptly, and ascended the stairs to the room occupied by Monte.

Reckless Ruth gazed after him a moment, her beautiful eyes glistening with admiration, while her hands were clasped together tightly.

"He is a hero!" she mused, softly—"the very beau ideal of the man I could love—ay! do love! Would to Heaven I could win and retain him! But, I fear—Mora's pretty face!"

She turned abruptly, then put on her hat and left the house.

In the mean time Dick had been admitted to the sick-room by Mora, who silently shook him by the hand and led him to Monte's bedside.

She then pulled the curtains aside, allowing more light to fall upon the bed, at which the detective uttered a startled cry.

Monte was asleep, but his sleep was more like that of a corpse.

Since Dick had last seen him, his face had grown more cadaverous and deathly, the features contorted except around the eyes, where a bluish bloom was perceptible, the eyes being sunken deep into their sockets. His lips were almost colorless, and he had every appearance of a person whose spirit was on the eve of taking its flight back to the Giver.

Dick's exclamation of surprise caused the stricken man to open his eyes, and an expression of recognition dawned upon his face.

"It's you, eh?" he said, faintly. "Where have you been so long?"

"The prisoner of Crimson Cowl, the road-agent, your deadly foe!" Dick replied. "I only escaped a short time ago. You don't look as well as when I last saw you, Mr. Monte."

"Nor am I. I have been failing very fast, and dissolution is near at hand. Detective,

there is no time to be lost. I must have a lawyer, at once!"

"Right you are! One will be here in a very few minutes. I have already sent for one."

"You have?"

"Even so. Ruth advised me that you were in a bad way, and I presumed you would desire the services of an attorney, before it got too late!"

"Very thoughtful of you, sir. I have been worrying lest I should drop away, ere I could make my will. I spoke to Dr. Jacques about it, but he said I had plenty of time, and had better defer the matter until I got stronger. But, instead of getting better I am growing weaker, all the time!"

"To the devil with Doctor Jacques!" Dick said, bluntly. "Mr. Monte, are you strong enough to hear my report?"

"Yes! yes! I am eager to know all. But, first, give me a swallow of the brandy, in yonder bottle!"

"Not a drop of it," Dick said, seizing the bottle indicated, and hurling it out of the window. "You can have all the brandy you want, but it must be out of a bottle that has never yet been opened. The stuff in that bottle was poisoned; the alleged medicines in these bottles are poison!"

The speculator looked thunderstruck.

"But, I—I don't understand!" he faltered.

"You will, when I am through!" Dick assured, quietly. "Mr. Monte, you are the victim of a hellish conspiracy to destroy your life ere you can make a will, so that your wife and daughter can share with Mora, in the division of your wealth. The main factor in this scheme is one whose name you know well—Michael Mork!"

"Michael Mork? Impossible!" Monte ejaculated, in astonishment. "The man is a seaman, and is not in this country!"

"Are you positively sure he is not in this country?"

"Well, I—I don't know that I can truthfully say I am quite as sure as that, but, it is not probable he is in America, even if he is alive. I have not heard from him for a number of years."

"That may be, but I can assure you he is here in Gunnison, and furthermore, that he and your wife—his former wife—are in collusion to get you out of the way, in order to come in for the better portion if not all of your property, and, in their scheme, they are abetted by your other daughter, and by your trusted family physician, Doctor Jacques!"

"Stop! I will not hear another word of accusation against the doctor!" James Monte cried, resentfully. "He has always been a good friend to me, and faithful in attendance!"

"Yes, faithful in his endeavor to kill you, this last trip, no matter whatever he was, before!" Dick undauntedly declared. "The medicine he has administered is rank poison; it is that which has been sapping your life away, and but for your remarkably strong constitution, you wouldn't be alive, now. Let me kick this doctor out of doors, and shut off his supply of drugs, and you'll be a well man inside of three weeks. Refuse, and I'm done with your case, altogether, and the undertaker can supersede me! If you want further proof of the fact, I'll go get a dog or cat, and dose it liberally with this medicine in the greenish bottle, and if the animal ain't sick or dead, before to-morrow morning, I will withdraw my complaint against Jacques!"

Dick spoke forcibly, even sternly, and his words evidently had some effect, although the invalid still looked doubtful.

"There is no need to try the experiment," Mora spoke up, "for I have already put the matter to the test. When you asked me to get you samples of the medicine, Mr. Bristol, I did so, but my curiosity being aroused, I tried them on Tabby, my pet cat, forcing him to swallow a tablespoonful of each kind!"

"And, what was the result?" Deadwood Dick demanded, eagerly.

"The poor thing died within the hour!" Mora replied, her lip quivering. "I thought everything of Tabby, but for poor papa's sake, I could not resist the temptation of making the test!"

Dick turned to Monte, who had uttered a gasping cry of astonishment.

"My good God!" the speculator faintly articulated. "Can it be possible I am the victim of such a heinous plot as this?"

"You surely are, and but for my timely escape from the power of Crimson Cowl, you were certainly doomed!"

"Very true. I see it all, now. Fling that

poison out of the window, and send Jacques to me. I will, weak as I am, prove myself better than a dozen dead men. Then, go and arrest the remainder of this infernal clique, in my name. My name is a legion with the city government and police force!"

"Time!" Dick said, sententiously. "I propose to have a 'duke' in the wind-up of this set-to, and I don't intend to get knocked out. Doctor Jacques is not to enter this room again. You are to strictly forbid it. As for the medicine, I will take charge of that, have it analyzed, and hold it as evidence against Jacques, and if possible, force him to turn State's evidence against the main actor in the case. As for the rest of them, leave 'em to me. Will you do it? Are you satisfied I am working in your interests?"

"Noble young man, could I be otherwise? I am hardly in condition to express my gratitude now, but, after what I have heard, I have some hopes that I may recover, and then, you shall feel the power of sincere brotherly love."

"I hope, and feel confident you will recover!" Dick said. "What you want is plenty of light but strength-giving nourishment, no medicine—nature will attend to that—and quiet and rest, and, mark my word, you will be a new man, shortly. Invest in your daughter the power to summarily discharge this Jacques, and forbid him the house. Have one of your nurses with you, constantly, and allow no one in this room without their approval. I will post them, and I will do the rest!"

"God bless you, my boy, God bless you!" was all the stricken man could utter—through force of emotion.

"Another thing," Dick pursued, "the lawyer will be here, soon, and you can depend on it that Ruth will not bring any one you cannot trust. Make your will in whosever's favor it may please you, and you will be safe, no matter what the emergency, in case you confide the document to the care of some one you can implicitly trust!"

"No one but you shall have it, until I am better!" Monte pointedly declared. "I would trust you with my fortune—my life. Unsolicited you have come to Jim Monte a stranger, and as I hope, not only frustrated a devilish plot, but saved his life. Is there anything more, Bristol?"

"But one thing that I think of. When captured by Crimson Cowl, I was relieved of all my money, and so forth, including the ring, that put me on the trail. I may need some funds until I get my grip on Mr. C. C. again."

"Certainly, my boy. Mora, go to my safe, and get a hundred dollars for our friend, and supply his necessities whenever he may request. Also, fetch me a drink of new milk. I'll be hanged if I don't feel a little more vim in me already! In the mean time, Dick, let me hear of your experience with Crimson Cowl!"

Dick briefly narrated his experience, as connected with his visit to Monte cottage No. 2; by this time Mora was back, and there was a startled expression upon her face.

Dick noticed it instantly.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"The doctor was near the door, when I left this room," she replied, "and had evidently been eavesdropping. He turned abruptly, descended the stairs and left the house!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE JEW PROVES WHITE.

DEADWOOD DICK could scarcely repress an imprecation when he heard Mora Monte's report.

"I don't half like this!" he said, "and will see to whom Doctor Jacques conveys the information he has obtained. Don't neglect the will, Mr. Monte, and intrust it to Ruth's care until I return!"

"Why not to my daughter's?"

"As you like, only I thought Ruth might be better able to take care of it, in case something might be known, of which we are not aware, you see. Should Jacques not have overheard that I am to have possession of it, Mora would naturally be suspected, which might bring her more trouble than Ruth!"

James Monte suddenly looked curious.

"Why?" he abruptly asked. "Mora, although not brought up in the West, is expert in the use of weapons!"

"Even so. Ruth has a stronger claim, I hope, on Mike Mork than your daughter!"

Monte stared.

"Do you know? Is it possible?" he demanded.

"I know that Reckless Ruth is Crimson Cowl's daughter?"

"Crimson Cowl's!"

"Exactly!"

"Then, Crimson Cowl and Mike Mork are one and the same?"

"They are. I am sure of this through certain circumstances that have come to my notice!"

"I have known that Reckless Ruth was the daughter of Mork, for some little time!" Monte admitted, "but—well, detective, go ahead. I have been detaining you too long, perhaps."

"Well, remember my instructions," and Dick took his departure.

His first destination was the pawnbroker shop of Levi Lazarus.

The bland "uncle" presided behind the counter, this evening, and was all smiles when he saw and recognized Dick. Did he think the diamond ring was "going up" again, never to be redeemed? If so he was destined to be disappointed. Dick was on a far different errand than to "spout" a ring.

"Hello! Isaac, are you waiting for a coon to skin?" Dick demanded. "How is trade, to-day, son of Abraham?"

"Very pad! very pad! I lose monish in dis pizness," was the reply.

"A cold day when you do," Dick retorted. "But, say—silence! Crimson Cowl is on deck. He is furious that I worked the detective racket on you, and will have your life if I don't shut off his wind and so wind up his career."

The Jew looked terrified.

"Yesh! yesh! mine frient!" he articulated, excitedly. "I vas no frient of dis bad man, Crimson Cowl, so he goes for me, I spects."

"Look here, Levi; I can save you from the Cowl, and also from prison, in connection with this affair, or I can deprive you of the society of your daughter, for many a year. You love your daughter, don't you?"

"Mine daughter, sir? Vy she is von part of mine life, I am sure!"

"You wouldn't want to be separated from her?"

"Nein! Id would preak mine heart to lose mine shild, Rachel."

"Well, so I thought. I have got onto this whole scheme between Mike Mork, Felice Monte and the rest of you who are connected with it. Now, if you want to stick by them, you will get arrested with them. If you are wise, you will stand by me. Which will you do?"

"Py gracious, mine young frient, I will stick py you, and as proof of dot I dells you I haff sometink dot pelong to you!"

"Something that belongs to me?"

"Yes. Id vas leaf here py a man. I don't vas know him, except his name vas Henhawk Hank, an' he dells me to take precious good care I don't lose id, nor let nopody see id! Here id vas!"

With this the Jew handed Dick a tiny pasteboard box, which, upon being opened, revealed to view—Dick's detective badge and diamond ring!

Naturally enough, he was elated. The badge was quite essential for the work before him; the ring he had promised to return to Ruth, and had by no means forgotten that promise.

"So Henhawk Hank gave you these, eh?" Dick demanded, surveying the Jew inquiringly.

"Mine dear frient, he did!"

"How much did you give him on them?"

"Noddinks, mine frient, noddinks! He simply wanted me to hold dem for safety keeps for a vile. I didn't vas kno' dey pelong to you, ontil I examine der gondents of t'e box!"

"Very well. I'll take charge of these things, and make it right with you at the proper time."

"All right, mine frient; dey vas yours, vid pleasure."

"Levi, you're a trump! And now, old gent, as you've got plenty of odds and ends in this shebang, I want you to rig me out with a disguise as quick as possible."

"A disguise?"

"That's what I said. I want to visit Mrs. Monte's cottage, or, at least, that vicinity."

Lazarus nodded, and a shrewd twinkle entered his eyes.

"You vas a smard young mans, Teadwood Tick," he averred. "I haff just vat you vants. I vill gonfess I knows much about dot little pizness against Mr. Monte; and since you vas a detectives, and I intends hereafter to lead an honest life, I vill helb you all I can. Could you speaks like ash me der Hebre-v dialect?"

"I yoost can dot, mine frient."

"Very goot! I send you to Mrs. Monte, disguised as myself. Come, mine frient; I proves to you I am an artist. I vonce vas der best in

der pizness. I haff peen to Mrs. Monte's, and I can post you."

"Levi, you're a brick!" the detective cried, enthusiastically. "Go ahead and fix me up, and success is sure."

Lazarus led the way to the back room, and, with the skillful aid of Rachel, soon transformed Dick's appearance into that of a Jew—the very counterpart of Lazarus himself.

The pawnbroker and his daughter were well supplied with the necessary articles to perfect the disguise, and when Dick was commanded to survey himself in a glass, he was certainly surprised.

During the time he was being "rigged out," Lazarus and Rachel conversed rapidly in Hebrew and Dick judged, from the admiring glances the girl leveled at him and the exceeding care with which his toilet was being arranged, that the Jew had aroused in her a more than business interest in the daring adventurer.

At last all was done; then, in confidence, Lazarus took Dick aside, and told him some things he had not known before, besides posting him how to act on his visit to Grass-Widow Monte's cottage.

The conversation went to prove that Lazarus had gradually gained an insight into the plot against James Monte; that he had unwittingly been drawn into the game, and had forcibly been made an accessory to the scheme, and a "fence" for Mork, alias Crimson Cowl, and that he was considered an active spy for the spotters.

This confession was made with such apparent candor and humiliation that Deadwood Dick at once concluded that Lazarus had an honest vein in him, and had resolved to cut loose from the scheming clique.

Dick now bade the pawnbroker and his daughter good-by, and took his departure.

"Rachel, mine shild, we vas rich, purty soon, now," the Jew said. "Keep dot vedder eye on der young man, mine dear shild!"

Half-way to Mrs. Monte's, he encountered Sam Shortsleeves, the sheriff.

"Hello! how you vas, mine frient?" Dick saluted.

The sheriff, giving him a withering glance, replied:

"Git out, ye sheeny! Don't speak to me, or I'll break your head!"

"Not much you won't!" Dick replied, in his natural voice. "You wouldn't do that for the world, Shortsleeves. Have you seen Ruth, recently?"

The official stared.

"Yes, I have!" he replied. "But, what in thunder is it your business?"

"The business of an officer of the law!" was the reply. "Away, now, to the Monte residence, and guard it against intrusion, until I see you again. I am Deadwood Dick!"

Then turning, Dick hurried on, leaving Shortsleeves the most astonished man in Gunnison.

CHAPTER XV. THE PSEUDO LEVI.

DICK reached the vicinity of Felice Monte's cottage just in time to catch a glance of Doctor Jacques entering the kitchen door.

The kitchen was the only part of the house that was lighted.

"As I thought!" the detective mused; "Jacques has come to make a report of what he overheard. I must hear the report!"

He hurried forward, and a few seconds later, was rapping at the kitchen door.

It was partly opened by Felice, who surlily demanded:

"Who's there?"

"Mine uncle, Levi!" Dick responded, following the instructions which he had received from Lazarus.

"All right. Come in!"

Dick entered the kitchen, to find four persons in the room, besides himself—Felice, Belle Monte, Doctor Jacques, and a smoothly-shaven, hard-faced man of over middle age, who, however, the detective had no difficulty in recognizing as Jack Myers, of the stage-coach affair, otherwise Crimson Cowl the road-agent!

The three at the table nodded, familiarly, while Felice handed the Jew a chair.

Fortunately, the room was but dimly lighted by the one tallow candle, and Dick felt there was little danger of his identity being detected, or his disguise being penetrated.

"Well, Lazarus, what brings you out, tonight?" the smooth-faced man demanded.

"Droubles!" was the reply. "I vas ferry much worried, mine frient Michael!"

"What are you worried about?"

"Dot brisoners—dot vellers, Teadwood Dick!

Veepin' Rachel, dot man haf escaped, and ve shall all get arrested! Oh! I vish I vas a t'ousandt mile away!"

"Oh! nonsense. We'll fix the cuss yet, and I was an idiot I didn't knife him when I had him. Doc has just been telling that he had escaped. Where did you see him, Laz?"

"He vas at mine store, not more ash ten minutes ago."

"What for?"

"Handcuffs. I haff some in der vindow, and he vant to bur 'em."

"Did you sell them to him, cuss you?"

"Laz" shook his head knowingly.

"Not I," he replied. "I tinks to mineseluf maype perhaps I s'pect what, he vant to do vid dose handcuffs, an' I put der price so steep vot he not puy dem. Den I come quick here."

"Bully for you, Lazarus. You're a jewel."

Then turning to the doctor, "Michael" added.

"Matters do look bad, Jac. But go on and let us know what you overheard."

"Well," said Jacques, "as I stated, I saw Deadwood Dick enter the house, when, unbeknown to any one, I was lounging in the parlor. I heard him inquire after Monte's condition. Your daughter, Reckless Ruth, told him he was much worse. He then sent her at once for a lawyer, and went up-stairs."

"Bad pizness! bad pizness!" commented the pseudo Lazarus. "If he makes a vill, ve shall lose der monish, an' haf all our bains for our drubbles."

"Shut yer mouth!" growled Mike Mork.

"If you're wantin' to back out of the game, why, do so. We can get along without you."

"Not much vas I draw out," was the reply. "I stick to der vessels 'til she go down mit der bottom."

"Well, keep mum, then. Go ahead, Jac."

"Well, I followed the detective up-stairs, and positioned myself outside of Monte's door," resumed Jacques, "and there became an interested listener. Not suspecting my presence, the occupants of the room talked without restraint. It is unnecessary that I should repeat what I overheard, as fewer words will explain matters, and there is no time to be lost."

"This accursed Deadwood Dick has fathomed the whole scheme, and given it to Monte; not only given it to him, but fully convinced him, so, henceforth, I am barred from the house, and my work has been frustrated in that direction."

"Have the medicines been detected?"

"Yes. The detective suspected them, and through his instrumentality the girl Mora detected them. She dosed her pet cat, and the cat kicked the bucket."

Mork gritted his teeth.

"That is bad," he growled.

"I should say it was!" hissed Felice, her evil eyes flashing, and her vinegary visage assuming a harsh expression. "What's to be done?"

"A thunderin' pile, if we hope to win now," Mork replied. "But for this infernal detective everything would have gone smooth. I curse myself that I didn't kill the cuss when I had him in my power. Is there anything else, Doc?"

"Monte's will is to be made in Mora's favor, and she is to be sole legatee, with exception of, I presume, the provisional dollar for the wife and other daughter. Jim Monte is not the man who does things by halves, and now, confident that he may recover, by ceasing to use my medicines, he will be a hard subject to deal with, aided and abetted as he is by this Deadwood Dick, whom at last he considers a matchless sleuth, and, in my humble opinion, he ain't far from right. The fellow is sharper than heat lightning."

"Well as I said, the will is to be made in Mora's favor, and placed in Deadwood Dick's hands for safe keeping. The witnesses to the document will most likely be Sheriff Shortsleeves and either the detective or Ruth. If we hope to win, these parties must be squelched, without delay and the will destroyed. There is not a doubt in my mind but what Monte will pass in his checks, before morning, so what we do must be done without delay!"

"Very true. We are in great danger. But, how did the accursed detective find me out?" Mork demanded.

"More than I can tell you. He has ferreted it out that you are both Mike Mork and Crimson Cowl, and that we are all, excepting Lazarus, in collusion in the scheme. How he has gained this information is more than I know or can surmise. He seems capable of solving any riddle."

"What lawyer was sent for?"

"I don't know. Dick ordered Ruth to get the best and most reliable one in town!"

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"Curse that girl!" Mork gritted. "Although she is my daughter, she is proving treacherous. She had better keep out of my way. Now, work is before us, and no time must be lost. Failure stares us in the face, but victory *must* be ours. It's either victory or prison. Ere now, no doubt, the will is made, so there's three moves to be made: Deadwood Dick, Ruth, and the lawyer must all be silenced; the will must be secured and destroyed; then the sheriff, Mora, and Jim are to follow. It's a desperate undertaking, but I am satisfied we shall succeed!"

"I think I haff a plan!" the *pseudo* spoke up.

"Out with it, then! You've got a pretty shrewd head, Levi, and perhaps can suggest something useful!"

"Yesh! I tinks I can. I haf peen in der habit of borrowing money from Monte, at times, to put out on loans. I now haf bayments to make to him, so dot I can make access to his house. See?"

"Yes. Go on!"

"Vell, I go mit his house in, and see how der land lays, and den come pack and report. In der mean time, you all keeps yourseluf quiet here, and let no one in der house ontil I return. Vile at der Monte mansion, I vil teliver to Miss Mora a letter purporting to come from Teadwood Tick, asking her to come to mine vacant house, vich ish on der outskirts of der town, der letter delling her dot der writer haf made a most important discovery, and needs assistance."

"Der vay to mine house is dark, and not so mooch settled, and vile on der vay you can kidnap der girl, and take here to der house, and can do as you like mit her. Dot ish none of my peesness, so long vot I gets my share of der spoils."

"I vill den go to der hotel where Teadwood Tick stops, and ven he shleeps sount vid der aid of some instruments vot I haf, I vil gwick der room, secure der vil, and dot much vil be done. Der rest of der peesness vil be easy. After I returns to you, you, Meester Mork, can go to Teadwood Tick's room, and do as you please. Dot vil pe none of my peesness!"

"By heavens, you are a shrewd one, and a daring one, too, Jew!" Mork declared, admiringly. "The plan is a capital one, and shall be carried out. Once we get possession of Mora and the will, and silence Deadwood Dick, the rest, as you say, will be easy. There is one thing, however, that I would suggest."

"Vot ish dot?"

"That we all go to your vacant house, on the outskirts of the town, and remain there for the present. It will be safer than here, and we shall need to be there to guard our prisoner. Is the house furnished?"

"No!"

"Well, we can take along some blankets for to-night, and to-morrow move in some furniture. Have you the key to the house?"

"No, you will find t'e door unlocked."

"Very well. We will go there at once, and I will be on the lookout, when the girl comes along. You can go now and tend to your part, and if you succeed your share in the results will be large."

"Laz" seemed greatly pleased at this prospect, and took his departure.

CHAPTER XVI.

BEGINNING OF THE END.

LEAVING the Monte cottage Dick made his way to the house of James Monte, where he sought a private interview with Mora.

To her he made known the particulars of his recent adventure, and instructed her how to act her part in the plot to have her captured by Mark.

Mora was a brave girl, but was doubtful of the consequences of such an adventure.

"They may murder me!" she said.

"No fear of that!" Dick replied. "I don't believe your mother is inhuman enough to allow that to be done!"

"Why not, if she is inhuman enough to enter into such an awful conspiracy against my father?"

"Oh! I don't believe you will be harmed, at all. You will simply be held a prisoner, until they can get a hold of your father's wealth. My object in having you fall into their power is to get a positive case against them, so that I can have them arrested, with other evidence than my own of their guilt."

"I hope, then, after they are once in jail, to get a confession out of your sister, as States' evidence, that will implicate the other three. Even if I fail in this, I have no fear but what I can secure their conviction."

"Must I go to-night? The hour is getting very late!"

"Yes, to-night is the time, if ever. The blow must be struck before daylight comes."

"But, will you be sure and soon come to my rescue?"

"Most assuredly, and that, too, before morning!"

"Very well, then I will go at once. I am willing to do anything in my power to assist you and help papa out of his trouble."

"Very well. The sooner you go the better. I will go up and see your father awhile, and then organize a band of men, and fetch them to your rescue!"

Dick then went up-stairs to the sick-room, and found Ruth and Sheriff Shortsleeves on duty, while the invalid was sound asleep.

"Well, detective, what luck?" the sheriff asked.

"Oh! pretty fair," Dick replied. "I've located the game, and am going to gather it in, pretty soon. I shall need your services, however, and a few good men besides."

"All right. I'm at your disposal whenever you want me, and shall be only too glad to help you!"

"Very well. Go now and get half a dozen men together, and have them at Fargo's about midnight. I will join you there, and, ere another sunrise, I will have Mr. Monte's enemies under lock and key!"

The sheriff then took his departure, to carry out Dick's instructions, while the latter conversed a few minutes with Ruth, revealing to her the role Mora was to play, so that the girl sport would not be alarmed at her absence.

Then cautioning her to keep a sleepless watch over the sick man, to tireless sleuth took his departure, and at once made his way to the lately untenanted cottage of Levi Lazarus, to find it already tenanted by the quartette of schemers.

"We got her!" Mike Mork said, in triumph, after he had admitted the mock Jew. "Didn't have the least trouble in the world."

"Dot ish goot!" Deadwood Dick replied.

"Vare you haff got her now?"

"In the next room, bound to a chair. She kicked up such a row that we was forced to do it. What have you accomplished since we saw you last, besides sending the girl here?"

"Vel, I have visited Teadwood Tick's room in t'e hotel, and searched his clothes, but I don't vas find no vill. If he haf got it he haf hidden it!"

Mork uttered an oath.

"That's devilish unfortunate!" he growled. "If a will was made some one has got it. How was Monte when you was at the house?"

"A good deal petter. Reckless Ruth say he haf hopes of recovery!"

Mork grated his teeth wickedly.

"He'll trip up on that if I have to knife him again!" he hissed. "Who was in attendance upon him while you were there?"

"Reckless Ruth!"

"Curse the girl! She is too much in the way to suit my notion, and I shall be under the necessity of putting her out of it, I am afraid."

"Perhaps she has the will in her possession!" spoke up Belle. "You know she and father have been quite thick together, of late!"

"Just my idea," assented Felice. "It's more than probable that your surmise is right. What do you think, Mike?"

"It hadn't occurred to me until now," was the reply. "There may be something in that; anyhow, it will bear investigation, after I have paid a visit to Deadwood Dick. Did you leave the door of his room unfastened, Levi?"

"Yes, I did, und, more as dot, I makes him sdrong under der influence of gloryform."

"Then, I allow it behooves me to pay him a visit before he wakes up. Ah! are you off, Levi?" for Levi had risen from his seat.

"Yes, I t'ink I go home. Good-py!"

"Good-by. I'll see you to-morrow," and Dick left the cottage, and hurried away in the dark.

"The game works fine!" he muttered. "If Mr. Mike Mork visits my room, as I have no doubt he will, he will find a committee of two there to receive him, namely, the sheriff and myself. Once we get him caged, it will be easy enough to handle the rest of the gang. Veriyy, my Jew disguise has stood me in a good turn."

Dick did not go immediately to the hotel, but dropped into Fargo's, where he found Sheriff Shortsleeves and half a dozen sturdy men in waiting.

Dick ordered them to remain at the saloon, while, accompanied by Shortsleeves, he set out for his room, at the hotel.

On the way he made known his clever dodge

to take Crimson Cowl into custody, in his forthcoming visit, and the official was greatly elated at the prospect of bagging such valuable game.

"You're a brick, as I always said you war, since I furst see'd you!" the sheriff declared. "If I had your gumption, I'd be pretty lively, you can bet, for I'm no baby, if I do say et. Now, what do you want of me?"

"What do I want of you? Well, my plan is this, and I have faith it will work successfully:

"Crimson Cowl, supposing me to be chloroformed, will enter my room to kill me. I will be in bed, apparently asleep, when he enters. The light will be burning. Close to the head of my bed, protected by a curtain, is a niche or alcove, wherein you can be secreted. After the outlaw stealthily enters the room, and his back is turned to you, pounce upon him, and secure his knife. He will handle no other, in my room, as firearms wouldn't do. When you have secured his knife, or knife arm, I will do the rest. I have everything ready!"

"Kerect, my friend, but, maybe you won't have a chance to take a hand in it at all. A good thump from my pile-driver, here, will beat the cuss out in beautiful shape!"

"Don't do it. I lead here, and as U. S. D. can arrest without a warrant. You are only my second in the case. Satisfied?"

"Ef I wasn't I'd orter be whaled within an inch of my life," was the response.

Then they strode on in silence!

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

MIKE MORK said little after the pseudo Jew's departure from the Lazarus tenement, but sat with knitted brows in deep thought.

"To-night must tell the tale!" he said, glancing at Felice. "If we win, we win. If we lose we lose. The chances are we will—"

"What?" Felice demanded, fiercely.

"Lose!" was the grim reply.

"You're a f o!" was the sharp retort. "Are you weakening? The road to success is straight before you! Go ahead and do your work."

"I notice you do a mighty little of it, Felice!"

"If you prefer, I will do the whole, and claim the whole," she said, serenely.

"Well, no, I reckon not," Mork growled.

"I've done the most of the work, and intend to have most of the profits!"

"Then, why do you hesitate?"

"I have a strange foreboding of coming evil!" was the reply. "Felice, you were always my evil genius, and I somehow feel impressed with an idea that we will fail!"

"Bah! you're getting chicken-hearted! How are we to fail? Monte is at the point of death; Mora is under our control; and Deadwood Dick is at your mercy. As for the rest—bah! If you are afraid, I will care for them. Brace up, and begone! You have work to do, ere morning, and it must be done well. I hope you are not so ignorant, but what you understand my meaning?"

"I'm no fool!" was the gruff reply, as the ruffian arose. "Three of the obstacles shall be removed before sunrise. In the mean time, mind your p's and q's. No sleep to-night! I'm off now, and when you hear from me again, you will hear news."

Donning a long rubber coat, and hat of the same material, Mork left the cottage, and his face at once underwent a great change of expression, being more characteristic of the malevolent nature of a demon.

"She's a good 'un!" he muttered, fiercely. "She always took me as a fool-tool, but she will find that experience has made me even sharper than she is. I will do the work before me."

He quickened his pace; but shortly he slackened it to a slow walk; a flood of detaining memories seemed to sweep over him.

"Ruth is connected with this," he muttered, "and I deserted her—left her to shift for herself. I recognize her, and intuition tells me she knows me. Never would she have identified me but for her acquaintance with that devil Deadwood Dick. Gods! how I hate the fellow, with all his shrewdness!"

"He loves Ruth; Ruth loves him; at least so Jacques says, and Jacques don't often go very much out of the way. Curse the girl! Does she seek vengeance on me? We will see!"

That old tigerish gleam appeared in his evil eyes, and he drew and felt of the edge of a knife.

"I'll be sure, this time!" he muttered. "Things are getting a little close, but, I'll play the last ball for the corner pocket, or—lose!"

Directly he came to the residence of James Monte. The window of the sick man's room

was up, the blinds wide open, and a brilliant flood of light shone out through the darkness.

Ruth was sitting near the window, yet in plain view, engaged in reading as the patient slept.

Mork glared at her a moment, all his evil passions aroused.

"It was she who gave me away!" he hissed. "How else could the detective have got onto the business? My one child, too! But, what of that? Treachery of child to parent needs but one reward. And, by the gods, she shall have it, and then—then, I'll easily fix the other."

In a fit of uncontrollable passion, which was a part of his fiendish nature, he had drawn a self-cocking revolver, and then the weapon went off.

With a low scream, Ruth threw up her arms, and disappeared from view, of course falling upon the floor.

The assassin waited a moment, then hoarsely uttered:

"sk! I've done for her, and the shot has not been son'rd. I might as well finish the other at once."

"Over the fence he went, and up one of the veranda pillars, with the agility of a cat, his skill proving that he had indeed once been a seaman."

The roof gained, it took but a moment to reach the window, and a glance revealed Reckless Ruth stretched upon the floor, to all appearances, dead.

James Monte was sitting upright in bed, a wild, terrified look upon his face.

With an oath, Mork drew a knife, and attempted to enter the room, through the open casement.

But, stop!

The figure on the floor suddenly sprung erect; a pistol gleamed in her hand; then there was a flash and a report.

With a death-yell, Mike Mork sunk downward, upon the window sill, about half in and about half out of the room, just as Deadwood Dick and Sheriff Shortsleeves made their appearance on the roof of the veranda which they had detected the would-be assassin in the act of climbing.

But they were too late.

Crimson Cowl, *alias* Mike Mork, had paid the penalty of his wickedness, and that, too, by the hand of his own offspring!

It was while proceeding to the hotel that they heard the shot, and making their way hastily to Monte's residence they had witnessed the tragedy of the window.

That detained them but a few moments, and to "close in" at once, Deadwood Dick and Shortsleeves soon a raid led on the cottage occupied by Mrs. Monte and Belle, and captured both of them, as well as Doctor Jacques, and consigned them to the care of the local jailer, at the same time, of course, rescuing and restoring Mora to her home.

As Dick had predicted, the terrors of the jail caused Belle Monte to make a full confession, implicating herself and her mother, Mike Mork and Jacques. For this testimony she received only a light sentence, the mother and doctor receiving long terms of imprisonment.

The crime was also fixed upon Henhawk Hank, at about the same time, of shooting at Fighting Fargo, and he was given a five year's rest in the State Prison.

Not long after these tragic and exciting events, James Monte was sufficiently recovered to be about; then there was a grand wedding—a double one, too—at the Monte mansion.

The principals of the affair were, Hal Hayden and pretty Mora Monte, as couple Number One.

Couple Number Two, was Miss Ruth Mork, and Mr. James Monte;—for as nurse and patient, the two had grown to love each other, and as has since been proven, the match was an admirable one, in spite of the disparity of ages.

Among those present, were Deadwood Dick, Sheriff Shortsleeves, and Levi and Rachel Lazarus.

After the first two ceremonies had been performed, Levi mildly hinted that it would be a propitious occasion for the detective and Rachel to link their fates together; but as Dick was not "on the marry" at that particular time, he was forced to excuse himself, for the time being.

He received a fine reward for his services, and then, needing rest and relaxation from professional duty, he started on a pleasure trip to the East, of which he knew practically nothing, his principal destination being the great cities of New York and Philadelphia.

THE END.

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